

[take CHARGE]

Held back by RA? Regain your *freedom!*

BY LORI MURRAY

When it comes to helping his patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) feel their best, rheumatologist David Mandel, MD, knows it's all in the details. "You need something more than a simple, 'How are you feeling?' to determine what's really happening with a patient," explains Dr. Mandel, who practices in Mayfield Village and Chardon, OH. "If I'm trying to get details on how patients are functioning—can they bathe themselves? can they easily comb their hair?—it helps to have objective measurements," says Dr. Mandel, who uses the 3-step assessment shown at right. "This comprehensive information provides a better road map for the care of our patients," he says.

Indeed, having measurable goals is a key way to monitor RA severity, a chronic inflammatory disease that can cause joint damage and contribute to problems like heart disease. Fortunately, there are ways to determine how well your treatment is working or whether an adjustment can help steer you toward the ultimate goal: remission, which means you're relatively free of symptoms with no signs of ongoing joint damage.

Sound impossible? Early in his career, Dr. Mandel thought so, too. "I've had the good fortune to have cared for people for over 30 years, but before biologics [a newer class of RA medications] it was very frustrating. Since the first biologic came out in 1998, the management of RA has dramatically changed—it's just incredible," he says. "We used to say RA is associated with the 'C' word: crippling. Now we can *almost* say the 'C' is for cure."

▶ Ask your rheumatologist to:

1 Assess your everyday function with questionnaires and rating scales: "Each has its own limitations and strengths, but it gives us something concrete to measure and discuss," says Dr. Mandel, who offers patients a pre-appointment prep form on his website (www.dmandelmd.com). "One of the things that helps in our office is when patients fill out a Disease Activity Measurement form—sometimes it's apparent we need to make changes if they used to rate their ability to comb their hair or climb stairs as normal and now it's changed to mild or moderate impairment." **Find more self-assessment forms at HealthMonitor.com/RATools.**

