

# Words of wisdom from my rheumatologist

*"Hang up your coat—for good!"*



**Patient:**  
Janet Austin  
**Residence:**  
Birmingham, AL



**Rheumatologist:**  
S. Louis Bridges Jr,  
MD, PhD, Director,  
Comprehensive Arthritis,  
Musculoskeletal, Bone,  
and Autoimmunity  
Center, The University of  
Alabama at Birmingham

## HOW IT HELPS ME

"Bundling up in a coat may seem like a good way to shield stiff joints from the cold, but the pain and effort required just to put one on has been enough to keep me indoors! Forty years with RA have left my shoulders with chronic pain, limited movement and range of motion, making certain clothing choices, including coats, very difficult for me. A better choice I've found: a shawl or cape. Several years ago, I visited Ireland where I fell in love with the shawls so many women were wearing. Ever since, they've become a winter wardrobe staple for me. The ease of throwing a cape over my clothes as I walk out the door is a vast improvement. They come in different weights to carry me from the first fall chill to the coldest winter days. And best of all: No buttons required!"

## WHY IT WORKS

"People with RA often have a hard time getting dressed because of deformities of their hands or other joints. Shoulder issues are often seen in patients with RA. In addition to arthritis of the shoulder joint, there can be tendinitis, bursitis or rotator cuff tears, and pain in the muscles surrounding the joint. These can lead to decreased range of motion, particularly raising the arm or rotating it. A cape or shawl can be draped over the shoulders without the movements required for putting the arm through the armhole of a coat. This avoids the difficult movements often seen in patients with RA. By ditching the jacket, you can avoid the pain of putting on a coat, but still stay warm!"

*"Go to sleep and get up at the same time every day!"*



**Patient:**  
Donna  
Sheffield  
**Residence:**  
Austin, TX



**Rheumatologist:**  
David Kung, MD,  
Austin Regional  
Clinic, TX

## HOW IT HELPS ME

"When I developed RA, I realized that my sporadic sleep patterns were a huge trigger, so I set a rigid schedule and that's really helped. Because I'm up at 3:30 AM every morning, I make sure to be in bed by 7:30 PM and asleep by 8 every night! I never deviate from this—even if people come to visit, I tell them they can stay up but I'm going to bed! If I don't get proper rest, I pay for it all day long in pain. This is the best way I know to manage my RA and not let it manage me!"

## WHY IT WORKS

"Sleep disturbance affects more than half of those with RA. That's especially problematic as sleep disturbance has been found to be pro-inflammatory. The result may be a worsening of symptoms commonly experienced by people with RA—i.e., fatigue, depression and pain. As Donna's case shows, establishing a sleep schedule and bedtime routine can help people with RA avoid symptoms and feel more in control of their disease."  —by *Diana Whelan*

## Dr. Kung's tips for getting a full night's sleep

- **Create a good sleep environment.** Choose a comfortable bed/pillow with adequate support, don't work or eat in bed, and avoid lights, especially LED/blue light, before bedtime.
- **Keep a sleep diary.** Log when you go to bed, when you wake up and how long you're awake at night to help find reasons for insomnia and other sleep disruptions.
- **Avoid stimulants,** such as caffeine and nicotine, and don't eat disruptive foods (such as those that may promote reflux) in the afternoon or evening.