

QUESTIONS YOU MUST ASK TODAY

Guide to Living with RA

Health**monitor**[®]

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YOUR EXAM

34 ways
to outsmart
pain

**“It takes
a team!”**

Connecting with the
right health pros allows
Denise Levy to thrive
with RA

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“It takes a team to *feel your best!*”

When clients meet matchmaking consultant Denise Levy, they’re often amazed at how much energy she has—and can’t help but be inspired by her enthusiasm. Even after 20 years of helping singles find love, Denise still gets excited about sharing her knowledge and meeting people from all walks of life (her oldest client is 82!). No one would ever suspect the vibrant face behind *MissMatchMakerLive.com* has been shaped by a decades-long battle with rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

“People probably look at me and think I’m in great shape, but they have no idea what I’m going through. It’s a hidden disease,” says Denise, 46, who lives in Destin, FL. “Because I got rheumatoid arthritis at a young age, I learned how to build my life

around it. I chose to start my own business so I could do what I enjoy and set my own schedule.”

Still, it wasn’t easy. Over the years, Denise saw several rheumatologists in search of a therapy that would ease her pain. “I went through phases where I tried different treatments and phases where I gave up,” she admits.

“I said ‘No more!’— and took control”

In her 20s, Denise reached a crossroads: She was unhappy with both her job as a social worker and her RA treatment. “I got to the point where I said, ‘No more.’ I was determined to take control of my life.” Denise quit her job and answered an ad for a matchmaking agency—“it sounded like fun until I got another job in social work”—and

soon discovered she had a knack for helping people improve their communication skills and connect with the right person. Turns out those very same talents helped Denise build the healthcare team that would help her tame RA. “Relationships are about being there for the person, interacting and paying attention,” she says.

Denise started by forging a partnership with the right doctor. “I found someone who listens to me, looks at all my symptoms and gets the whole picture,” Denise says. “We discuss treatment options and decide together what course to take.” But Denise didn’t stop there. She rounded out her healthcare team with other professionals. That included a therapist to overcome the mental hurdles of dealing with a chronic disease. “I definitely

Dating coach Denise Levy, aka “Miss Matchmaker,” tells why controlling RA and finding love often require a similar strategy: It’s all about connecting with the right people.

recommend counseling if you have RA,” notes Denise. “My therapist has taught me how to detach from the pain, accept it and go about the day. I could lay in bed but that makes it worse because you’re focusing on the pain instead of refocusing on something else.” (For more on how

Make your mind an ally against RA



Denise Levy knows the power of a positive mindset: “My therapist helps me reframe how I think about my

pain and make better choices on how to respond.” It’s true that you can enlist your mind to control one aspect of the pain—how you *feel* about it, says rheumatologist Elinor Mody, MD, of Boston. “What’s your perception of the pain?” she asks. “How are you coping with it? What are your treatment options?” Because fear can increase the sense of pain, it’s important to find ways to deflect negative emotions: “Coping mechanisms such as deep breathing and meditative relaxation slow your pulse rate and help control anxiety,” says Dr. Mody. “With a positive attitude and the right treatment, you can live well with RA.”

thoughts affect pain, see box, below.)

Another expert on Denise’s team: an exercise trainer. “It gives you accountability,” she notes. “And he’s very good about watching my body closely to see what I can and can’t handle so I don’t wake up in pain the next day.” Denise also relies on a massage therapist to loosen tight areas and swears by her reflexologist. “I feel great afterward,” she says. “I’ll try anything once and if it works, I’ll keep doing it.”

“I choose to be happy!”

Today, Denise feels more in control of her RA than ever, thanks to her team of dedicated professionals and her upbeat attitude. This keeps her life humming as Denise balances family—she’s happily married and has a teenage son—with a job she loves. “I celebrated my 20-year anniversary in business by throwing a gala to raise money for charity, including a camp for kids with juvenile RA,” says Denise, who is on the faculty of The Matchmaking Institute. “I wanted to be an inspiration and show them that you can have a successful career and achieve your goals.”

Adds Denise: “Everything in life is a choice. When I wake up every day, I choose the life I want to live—and I make a choice to be happy!” 

—Lori Murray