

## **Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis: The Facts**

By: Corrie Billedeau

### **How common is Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis [JIA]?**

Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis is among the most common chronic diseases in children. An estimated one in 1000 Canadian children below the age of 16 live with JIA, making this one of the most common chronic disorders of childhood. True, the majority of Canadians living with arthritis are middle-aged or older, but JIA can strike babies, toddlers, children and adolescents.

### **What is JIA?**

JIA is defined as continuous inflammation of one or more joints lasting at least six weeks for which no other cause can be found. When arthritis begins before age 16, it is classified as JIA. Depending on the type, JIA may be relatively mild, or it can be progressive and disabling; it may be limited to the joints or affect the eyes and other organs. In some cases JIA resolves by adulthood; in others, its effects are life long, requiring ongoing medical care.

### **How can families manage JIA?**

Specialists provide this advice. Best possible outcomes are achieved by working closely with the arthritis treatment team. This may include the family doctor, a nurse, a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist, a social worker, a psychologist, an orthopedic surgeon, an ophthalmologist, a dentist and schoolteachers. The specific members of the team involved will be determined by the nature of the arthritis and a child's special needs. The most important members of the team are the parents and the child. With parental help and the guidance of the team, children can deal with even severe arthritis.

### **Is research contributing to better outcomes for children with JIA?**

While research has not yet provided us with a cure for childhood arthritis, there is effective therapy. Increased awareness about the full impact of JIA will hopefully lead to greater public support for research. The Canadian arthritis research community recognizes that children and youth with arthritis are a priority area on the inflammatory joint disease research agenda. Most children with JIA have a good long-term outcome. With proper therapy, most children will enter adulthood without any major physical disability.

**For more information about the book "I am Brave" call 1.800.321.1433 or [www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca)**

Over the next year Voices will publish articles on Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis. The CAPA Steering Committee acknowledges JIA has been greatly overlooked in terms of research and public education and needs to be addressed.

My compassion for finding a cure for this disease is that I lost a very dear friend to the complications of JIA. My friend was diagnosed with JIA at the early age of 6 months. He wasn't even 40 years old when he passed away leaving a young wife and a set of twins. If you wish to comment or would like more information, you can reach me, Corrie Billedeau, Chair JIA Committee, at [Billedeau@mts.net](mailto:Billedeau@mts.net)

(Information for this article was obtained from **Arthritis in Canada**, a publication by Health Canada in collaboration with The Arthritis Society, the Arthritis Community Research Evaluation Unit, and the Canadian Arthritis Network.)