

Checklist for Morning Stiffness in the Fingers and Back

The student asks the following questions:

- Where is the discomfort located? (Determine if it is an articular problem. If it is a joint problem, the pain should be localized to the joint and may involve some degree of functional limitations.)
- Which joints are involved in the discomfort? (Osteoarthritis and psoriatic arthritis commonly occur in the DIP joints.)
- Is it only one joint or is it bilateral and multiple joints? (Monarticular disorders involve gout, Lyme disease, and septic arthritis; whereas polyarticular disorders involve SLE, RA)
- How long does the morning stiffness last? (Less than 15 to 30 minutes, commonly OA; longer periods, RA).
- Do you have redness, swelling, or warmth? (Differentiates between inflammatory and noninflammatory arthritis)
- Have you had any recent or past trauma to the joint(s) involved?
- Are you able to perform all activities of daily living?
- What is your occupation?
- What is your past medical history? (Be sure to cover endocrine, musculoskeletal, and metabolic disorders.)
- Do you have a family history of arthritis?
- What aggravates the discomfort, and are there any associated symptoms? (Determine if there are characteristics of a systemic disease.)
- What medications are you taking, including over-the-counter medications? (Many patients may take aspirin or NSAIDs; often those with RA will experience some relief and take these medications routinely.)
- Have you traveled to an area endemic for Lyme disease? (Determine possibility of tick bite)