What is rheumatoid arthritis (RA)?
Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a serious condition. The body’s immune system attacks the lining of the joints, causing swelling, stiffness, and pain. If RA is not treated, it can lead to permanent joint damage and disability. It can be hard to diagnose RA because many other conditions cause similar symptoms. The exact cause is not known.

What are biologic DMARDs?
Biologics are a kind of DMARD (Disease-Modifying Antirheumatic Drug). These are drugs used to treat RA. Biologics do not cure RA, but they do ease symptoms. And they may help prevent more damage to your joints. However, they can cause serious side effects. You should try other treatments first.

Try other treatments before using biologics.
There are safer and less costly drugs to try first, including nonbiologic DMARDs, such as:
- hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil and generic)
- sulfasalazine (Azulfidine and generic)
- minocycline (Dynacin, Minocin, and generic)
- methotrexate (Rheumatrex and generic)

Your doctor may also recommend pain relievers, such as:
- ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, and generic)
- naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn, and generic)
- corticosteroids, such as prednisone

Exercise programs can help relieve pain, increase strength, and keep you independent.

Choosing a biologic.
If other treatments don't help enough, you and your doctor may want to try a biologic. You may need to try several to find one that helps you. Tell your doctor about all your health conditions and medicines. Ask about taking biologics safely. You will need to protect yourself from infections while taking biologics. And women should not get pregnant while taking them.

Biologics can have serious side effects.
More serious, life-threatening side effects include:
- Allergic reactions
- Bacterial infections, such as tuberculosis
- Lymphoma
- Liver damage

There are also less serious side effects:
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Injection site reactions, like pain or itching
- Nausea
- Respiratory and urinary tract infections

Our advice:
We compared nine different biologics.
- All of the biologics are costly—over $1,100 per month.
- They are injected either daily, weekly, or less often—at the doctor’s office or at home.
- All provide similar relief of symptoms, but they differ in safety and side effects.

We chose the following as our Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs. These drugs rated best in safety, cost, and how well they work. They may have fewer side effects. All are available as generics:
- Abatacept (Orencia)
- Adalimumab (Humira)
- Etanercept (Enbrel)

The chart on the next page can help you compare costs.
### Biologics: Drug Comparison Chart

**Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs are in blue.** We recommend these drugs because they work as well and are as safe as the other drugs, and they cost less.

Our analysis is based on a scientific review by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. This is a summary of a longer, more detailed report you can find at [www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org](http://www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best Buy</th>
<th>Generic Name &amp; Strength</th>
<th>Brand Name</th>
<th>How Often to Use</th>
<th>Average Cost per Month&lt;br&gt;a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Best Buy]</td>
<td>Abatacept 125 mg/mL</td>
<td>Oręncia</td>
<td>Every 4 weeks for intravenous injection Once a week for subcutaneous injection</td>
<td>$2,215 $2,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Best Buy]</td>
<td>Adalimumab 40 mg, injectable kit</td>
<td>Humira</td>
<td>Every week or every other week</td>
<td>Taken every other week: $2,632 Taken every week: $5,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Best Buy]</td>
<td>Adalimumab 40 mg, pen injector</td>
<td>Humira</td>
<td>Every week or every other week</td>
<td>Taken every other week: $2,654 Taken every week: $5,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Best Buy]</td>
<td>Anakinra 100 mg, disposable syringes</td>
<td>Kineret</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>$1,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Best Buy]</td>
<td>Certolizumab 400 mg, injectable kit</td>
<td>Cimzia</td>
<td>Every other week</td>
<td>$2,739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Best Buy]</td>
<td>Etanercept 25 mg, prefilled syringe</td>
<td>Enbrel</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>$1,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Best Buy]</td>
<td>Etanercept 50 mg, prefilled syringe</td>
<td>Enbrel</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>$2,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Best Buy]</td>
<td>Etanercept 50 mg, pen injector</td>
<td>Enbrel</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>$2,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Golimumab 50 mg, prefilled syringe</td>
<td>Simponi</td>
<td>Every 4 weeks</td>
<td>$2,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Golimumab 50 mg, pen injector</td>
<td>Simponi</td>
<td>Every 4 weeks</td>
<td>$2,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Infliximab 100 mg&lt;br&gt;b</td>
<td>Remicade</td>
<td>Every 4 to 8 weeks&lt;br&gt;c</td>
<td>Given every 8 weeks: $2,296&lt;br&gt;d Given every 4 weeks: $4,592&lt;br&gt;d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rituximab 10 mg/mL</td>
<td>Rituxan</td>
<td>Every 24 weeks&lt;br&gt;c</td>
<td>$1,324&lt;br&gt;d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tocilizumab 200 mg/10 mL</td>
<td>Actemra</td>
<td>Every 4 weeks</td>
<td>$1,797&lt;br&gt;c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tocilizumab 400 mg/20 mL</td>
<td>Actemra</td>
<td>Every 4 weeks</td>
<td>$1,825&lt;br&gt;c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**a** Prices are based on nationwide average retail prices for December 2012. Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs obtained prices from data provided by Source Healthcare Analytics, Inc., which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations. The price listed is for the medication only and does not include administration or other fees that could be incurred.

**b** Calculated price is based on an assumed body weight of 75 kg (165 pounds) and a dose of 6.5 mg/kg.

**c** Refers to an average interval; number of infusions required varies among people.

**d** A typical course requires closer intervals in the beginning. Average costs during the first year of treatment, therefore, may be substantially higher.

**e** Price might be unreliable because it is based on less than 20 prescriptions.

This series is produced by Consumer Reports and Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs, a public information project supported by grants from the state Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program which is funded by the multi-state settlement of consumer fraud claims regarding the marketing of the prescription drug Neurontin. This brief should not be viewed as a substitute for a consultation with a medical or health professional. It is provided to enhance communication with your doctor, not replace it.