



## Rheumatology – First Outpatient Appointment

### Introduction

The Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on the NHS ability to provide routine elective services. We recognise that patients are waiting longer than we would all like and it is not always possible to identify when treatment will take place. This document provides you with information on how you can support yourself while waiting to attend the hospital. The guidance has been written by clinicians who are responsible for your care.

### Guidance for Patients

Eating a balanced diet and having a healthy lifestyle can have a huge impact on arthritis and health in general. Although there are no diets or supplements that will cure arthritis, some people do find that their condition is affected by what they eat, how much they weigh and their physical activity levels. Getting enough good quality sleep can play a big role in helping you manage a long-term health condition like arthritis but the pain from the arthritis can make getting good quality sleep difficult. [Everyday tips for living with arthritis \(versusarthritis.org\)](#)

- **Smoking** is a risk factor for developing rheumatoid arthritis and is associated with more active disease, more joint damage (leading to joint deformities and loss of function). People who smoke are also less likely to respond to first- and second-line treatments used in inflammatory joint disease. Guidance on the support available to help you stop smoking can be found on [the NICE website](#).
- **Regular exercise** can lower your risk of osteoarthritis and hip fractures and reduces the risk of falls in older adults. For people who already have arthritis, or a related condition exercise can reduce pain and fatigue, improve the range of movement of your joints, reduce stiffness and increase the strength of your muscles which support your joints. You will find gentle walking and swimming beneficial. Avoid sitting down for long periods as this will stiffen your joints and increase your pain. [Get active - Better Health - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
- **Eating a balanced diet** – for people with arthritis this can help reduce the side effects of some drugs and offer some protection from conditions affecting the heart and blood, which can be a complication of some forms of arthritis.  
<https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/managing-symptoms/diet/>  
For tips on helping, you to start healthier eating habits, be more active and start losing weight, download the [free NHS Weight Loss Plan](#).

## My Planned Care Patient Information Platform

- **Reduce your alcohol intake** to less than 14 units per week as recommended for both male and female (or preferably below). Alcohol and some drugs can affect the liver, so it is important that if you do drink, you drink in moderation. Alcohol can increase some side effects, such as drowsiness, of medications such as strong painkillers and antidepressants used to treat pain. It can also increase the risk of stomach and digestive problems and bleeding, with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID's) such as Ibuprofen and steroid tablets such as prednisolone.
- **Sleep** - Getting the right amount of good quality sleep has many benefits for our physical and mental health and is just as important as having a healthy diet and doing regular exercise. Good sleep can help your concentration levels, help you manage your pain better, allow your body to repair damaged tissue. Improve your immune system (the body's natural defence against illness and injury) Help your mental wellbeing - not getting enough sleep can make you feel irritable or moody and increase feelings of anxiety and depression. Help you stay at a healthy weight - if you don't get enough sleep, you're more likely to have more chemicals in the body that make you want to eat more, and less of the chemicals that make you feel full. [Sleep | Improving your sleep when you have arthritis \(versusarthritis.org\).](#)
- Take care of your mental health by preparing yourself for your appointment, to help reduce anxiety and stress.
- Take your prescribed medication as instructed.

General information about the Trust can be found on the RJAH website or please click the link below:

[RJAH General Information Patient Leaflet](#)

To view all our patient leaflets please log on to our website <https://www.rjah.nhs.uk/> and under the For Patients section, select patient leaflets.

## What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

If you feel that your condition is worsening, or you have developed further symptoms please contact your General Practitioner in the first instance and they will either be able to support you or inform your consultant about your condition if they feel that this is appropriate.

If you are unable to speak to your GP, please call 111 for advice or visit <https://111.nhs.uk/>

For something life threatening – severe bleeding, breathing difficulties or chest pains – please dial 999.

## Contact Us

Email : [rjah.accesspatientqueries@nhs.net](mailto:rjah.accesspatientqueries@nhs.net)

Please note: This mailbox is monitored Monday-Friday during office hours.

Outside of these times please use 111 as indicated above.