

Rheumatology

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 are able to support yourself while waiting to attend the hospital. The guidance has been written by clinicians who are responsible for your care

Rheumatology is a medical speciality that cares for a wide range of conditions affecting the musculoskeletal system. It is used to describe painful conditions of the joints, muscles and surrounding soft tissues. We look after patients with Inflammatory Arthritis, Osteoarthritis and Connective tissue diseases such as Lupus, Systemic sclerosis or Vasculitis. We also see patients with soft tissue rheumatic complaints and fibromyalgia, although a lot of these conditions are now managed in GP practices. Many of the conditions treated are linked with the immune system attacking different body tissues. The Rheumatology Service is predominately outpatient based at both Warrington & Halton Hospital sites.

Guidance for Patients

Services we provide include:

- Daily consultant or nurse specialist appointments
- Nurse-led blood monitoring
- Joint aspirations & injections
- Biologic & immunosuppressive infusion therapy
- Drug Education
- Fibromyalgia programme (run by physiotherapy - appointment arranged following referral)
- Soft tissue injections

We offer specialist advice to inpatients as well as GP's. However, we do not provide an out of hours service.

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What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

Guidance for Patients

If your symptoms get worse this is known as a 'flare-up'

A flare is unpredictable and may start suddenly. It can last for hours, days, or even months if not treated. A flare may result in:

- **Increased swelling**
- **Worsening pain**
- **More joint stiffness**
- **Increased tiredness**
- **Feeling generally unwell or feverish**
- **Decreased appetite**

Sometimes a flare may follow an infection, such as a chest or urinary infection. In this case it is advisable to consult your GP as you may require treatment for the infection.

During a flare you may need to:

- Adjust some of your medication. Taking painkillers and/or anti-inflammatory tablets regularly should help control and minimise the pain. Never exceed the maximum recommended dose. You should continue to take all your other medication as normal. If you have active infection, you may need to withhold your Disease Modifying Drugs (you will have been advised of this during your initial drug education)
- If you are taking steroid tablets, it is important that you do not alter the dose without consulting your GP first.
- Anti-inflammatory gels may be applied locally to the affected joints following the manufacturer's Instructions

There are other things you can do to help yourself which can soothe painful joints:

- Rest or exercise? During a flare it is important to pace your activities. This means planning the day, taking into consideration your increased tiredness. You may need to take short rests in between activities but remember to keep those joints moving. This reduces stiffness and maintains muscle tone. You may be reluctant to exercise flaring joints, but it will help.
- Wearing wrist splints may help reduce pain by keeping the joint in a neutral position. Try to avoid putting pressure through an inflamed joint.
- Relaxation, distraction or imagery may help. This may include listening to music or picturing

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yourself in a pleasant environment

- Heat therapy includes wheat bags, a hot water bottle or electric heat pads (make sure these are wrapped in a towel so as not to burn yourself) and place on the painful joint or even having a warm bath or shower.
- Cold therapy includes wheat bags, bag of frozen peas, bag of ice cubes, gel pack or a bowl of water with ice cubes for hands or feet. Make sure these are wrapped in a towel before placing on your joint.

Hot and cold treatments should be applied for up to 15 minute intervals, with the exception of iced water where 5 minutes is acceptable. Always ensure that the skin has warmed up before re-applying.

Further Help

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Arthritis UK

Website: [Versus Arthritis](http://VersusArthritis)

Telephone: 0800 5200 520

NASS National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society

Website: [National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society](http://NationalAxialSpondyloarthritisSociety)

Telephone: 020 8741 1515

NRAS (National Rheumatoid Arthritis Support)

Website: [National Rheumatoid Arthritis Support - HELP](http://NationalRheumatoidArthritisSupport-HELP)

Telephone: 0800 298 7650

Contact Details

Appointments: 01925 662335

01925 662458 – Warrington

019287523595 – Halton

Email addresses

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Please note we will not give explicit clinical advice via telephone/email until you have been reviewed within clinic by a consultant first.