

## My Planned Care Patient Information Platform

# Rheumatology – Rheumatoid Arthritis

## 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.

Rheumatology is a branch of medicine that deals with the investigation, diagnosis and management of people living with rheumatic and musculo-skeletal diseases. These diseases are usually caused by problems in the immune system, inflammation, infections, or the gradual deterioration of joints, muscles and bones. Rheumatic and musculo-skeletal conditions affect soft tissues, joints, bones, cartilage, tendons, ligaments and muscles – also known as connective tissues.

**Rheumatoid arthritis** is a long-term condition that causes pain, swelling and stiffness in the joints. The condition usually affects the hands, feet and wrists. There may be periods where symptoms become worse, known as flare-ups or flares. A flare can be difficult to predict, but with treatment it's possible to decrease the number of flares and minimise or prevent long-term damage to the joints.

Some people with rheumatoid arthritis also experience problems in other parts of the body or more general symptoms such as tiredness and weight loss.

## What are the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis

Affected area		Comment
Rheumatoid arthritis mainly affects the joints. It can cause problems in any joint in the body, although the small joints in the hands and feet are often the first to be affected. Rheumatoid arthritis typically affects the joints symmetrically (both sides of the body at the same time and to the same extent), but this is not always the case.		
Joints	Pain in the joints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint pain associated with rheumatoid arthritis is usually a throbbing and aching pain. It is often worse in the mornings and after a period of inactivity.</li> <li>it's usually a result of injury or arthritis.</li> </ul>
	Knee pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The knee joint is probably the most frequently damaged joint and is particularly vulnerable as it takes the full weight of your body.</li> <li>But knee pain is not always a joint problem.</li> <li>Learn about the most common <a href="#">causes of knee pain</a> and what you should do</li> </ul>

	Inflammation of the joint lining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you have injured the joint recently and it suddenly becomes painful again, the thin layer of tissue lining the joints and tendons may be inflamed, a condition called traumatic synovitis.</li> <li>It usually does not cause any redness or heat</li> <li>You should be able to manage injury-related swelling at home with <a href="#">anti-inflammatory medicines</a>, such as ibuprofen, an icepack and rest.</li> </ul>
<b>Joints</b> - continued	Stiffness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joints affected by rheumatoid arthritis can feel stiff. For example, if your hands are affected, you may not be able to fully bend your fingers or form a fist.</li> <li>Like joint pain, the stiffness is often worse in the morning or after a period of inactivity</li> <li>Morning stiffness that is a symptom of type of arthritis called <a href="#">osteoarthritis</a>, usually wears off within 30 minutes of getting up, but morning stiffness in rheumatoid arthritis often lasts longer than this.</li> </ul>
	Swelling, warmth and redness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The lining of joints affected by rheumatoid arthritis become inflamed, which can cause the joints to swell, and become hot and tender to touch.</li> <li>In some people, firm swellings called rheumatoid nodules can also develop under the skin around affected joints</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Symptoms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tiredness and a lack of energy</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a poor appetite</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weight loss</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dry eyes - if the eyes are affected</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dry mouth</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chest pain - if the heart or lungs are affected</li> </ul>	

## Health and Wellbeing Guidance for Patients - Useful Website links

Whilst you are waiting for any procedure, it is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle and be as medically fit as possible. If you have any long-standing conditions such as high blood pressure you should get this reviewed at your Doctor's surgery to make sure it remains well controlled. This will also help prevent any unnecessary delays when you come for your pre-operative assessment.

- Information on a range of **Rheumatology** conditions including Arthritis can be found on the following websites:
  - [www.versusarthritis.org](http://www.versusarthritis.org) – Versus Arthritis is an arthritis charity, especially geared towards helping individuals manage differing forms of arthritis. They have useful online exercise programmes especially designed for those with painful arthritic conditions that will help maintain flexibility. They also offer self-help tips for managing arthritic pain, information on living well and treatment options
  - [Arthritis Research UK](#) – leading charity in arthritis research and information.
  - National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS) [enquiries@nras.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nras.org.uk)

General **health and wellbeing information** to support our local residents to stop smoking or with weight management [Healthy Surrey](#) has been commissioned to provide free stop smoking and weight management support our community.

- **National Stop Smoking and weight management support is also available via**
  - [Quit smoking - Better Health - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) The NHS stop smoking service provides a range of options to help you quit including support from an advisor, stop smoking medications, e-cigarettes and a digital offer for those who wish to quit by themselves. If you are not ready to quit smoking, but would like more information on how to protect your family, [Smoke free Homes](#), advises on how to make your home and car smoke free.
  - [Live Well - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) are here to help you and offer different levels of support to maintain a healthy weight and to stop smoking, alcohol support and eating well etc.
- **Healthy eating and being active**

Information and advice on healthy eating and becoming more active is available from:

  - [Eat well - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) (website) - includes easy to prepare meals for healthy meals and the [NHS Food Scanner app - Healthier Families - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) to help reduce levels of sugar in your diet.
  - [Weight Management Service](#) The service supports adults aged 18 years or over who want to lose weight and have been identified as obese.

- **Lose weight - Better Health - NHS**  
([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) (website) - includes tips on getting active for all, including the downloadable active apps, as well as tailored advice for those living with a long-term conditions.
- **Find out your BMI**  
You can get help to lead a healthier lifestyle if you're an adult (18 years or over) and your body mass index (BMI) is above average. Use this tool to [BMI calculator | Check your BMI - NHS | Please fill in your details \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) if it's too high, sign up for a programme that will help you lose weight BMI of 30+
  - **BMI of 28+**  
You can get support from the 'Live Well' website, if your BMI is 28 or over if at least one of the following applies:
    - you have Type 1 and 2 Diabetes or Metabolic Syndrome
    - you have problems with your heart, circulation, hypertension or high blood pressure
    - you have been diagnosed with anxiety/depression
    - you need to lose weight before receiving another medical treatment or surgery
    - you have a serious long-term health condition that is adversely affected by your weight such as musculo-skeletal disorders (back pain, mobility issues) and asthma
    - you're from a black or ethnic minority background.
  - **BMI of 25+**  
If you have a Body Mass Index of 25 or higher [Eat well - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) provides online support to help you lose weight and includes access to the NHS 12-week weight loss plan.

The NHS 12-week fitness plan will support your weight loss plan as well as improve your health. This is aimed at beginners and will help get you into the habit of regular exercise over the course of the programme. It is structured but flexible enough to allow you to fit the exercise sessions around your other weekly commitments.

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

If you are experiencing any worsening signs or symptoms of any musculo-skeletal problems, you should first consult your GP.

### a. Urgent Health Advice

For urgent health advice about physical or mental health, when it's not an emergency, please call 111 from any landline or mobile phone. You can also visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**b. Life Threatening Emergencies**

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

**Contact Us:**

<b>Call:</b> Ashford & St Peter's NHS Trust  Ashford Hospital : ☎ 01784 884 402 St Peter's Hospital: ☎ 01932 722 686	<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net">asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net</a>  For My Planned Care enquiries	<b>Trust Website:</b>  <a href="http://ashfordstpeters.nhs.uk">Home (ashfordstpeters.nhs.uk)</a>
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