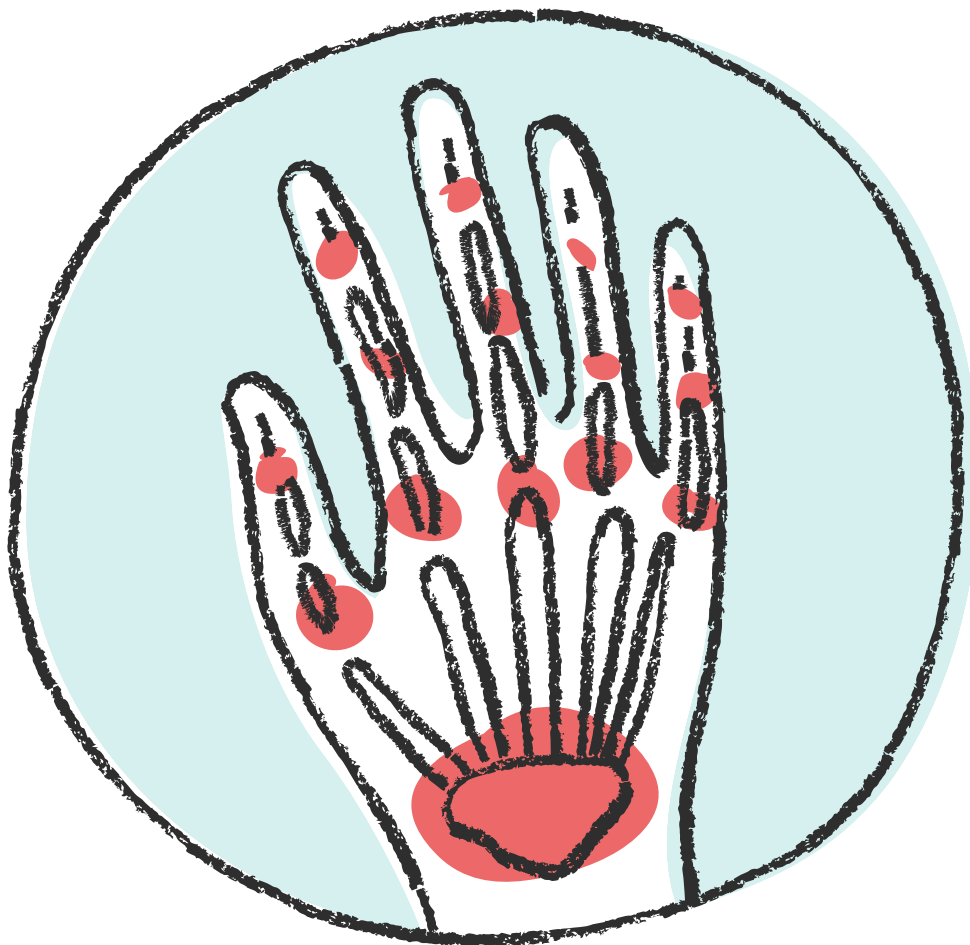


NHS HIGHLAND RHEUMATOLOGY SERVICE

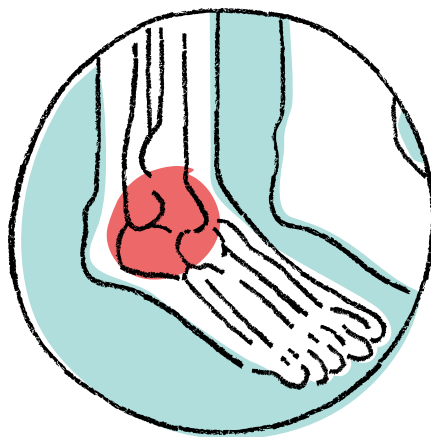
* PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET ON *
INFLAMMATORY ARTHRITIS



WHO IS THIS LEAFLET FOR?

This leaflet is for NHS Highland rheumatology patients who have inflammatory arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, juvenile idiopathic arthritis or axial spondyloarthritis (also known as ankylosing spondylitis).

The aim of this leaflet is to provide information about what to do when you experience a flare-up (that is, an episode when your arthritis symptoms get worse). It highlights how to get in touch with the rheumatology Advice Line and when this is appropriate. You can also find information about the waiting times for review appointments and biologics, and links to useful resources.



HOW TO MANAGE A FLARE-UP AT HOME

A flare-up is a period of increased disease activity or worsening arthritis symptoms – such as pain, swelling, stiffness and fatigue. Even if your disease is well controlled by medication, your joints may flare up occasionally. This might be triggered by an infection, stress or poor sleep but can also sometimes happen without an identifiable cause. There are things you can do at home to reduce your symptoms and hopefully shorten the flare-up.

1. REST AND PACING

During a flare-up, you may find that you require more rest than usual, and you may want to take time off work if this is possible for you. Trying to push through fatigue and pain are likely to make these symptoms worse so taking a break can be a good idea to allow your body to recover. However, staying completely immobile can be counterproductive. While intense exercise is not recommended, light stretching, swimming or gentle strolls can help relieve pain and stiffness. You may also want to use your splints if you have them.

2. WARM AND COLD COMPRESSES

Heat – in the form of a hot shower or bath, or a hot water bottle – can help with joints that feel stiff and achy. In contrast, cold packs can help soothe hot and swollen joints. Alternating between hot and cold immersion – also known as contrast bathing/hydrotherapy – can also be beneficial.

3. REGULAR PAINKILLERS

Your GP is likely to have prescribed you painkillers to help control your joint pain – such as ibuprofen, naproxen or celecoxib. During a flare-up, you may need to take these regularly throughout the day (without exceeding the maximum daily dose detailed in your prescription).

Taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as naproxen or ibuprofen with food or medication like lansoprazole or omeprazole can help protect your stomach from irritation. If you have been prescribed NSAID gel, apply this over the affected joints as per instructions. If you have not been prescribed painkillers, your GP can arrange this for you.

4. STEROIDS FROM YOUR GP

Your GP can prescribe a short course of steroids for you to help tackle your flare-up, either as tablets or injections. While long-term steroids can have serious side effects, using them as a short course during a flare-up can dramatically improve your symptoms. Your GP is welcome to contact the rheumatology service directly if they have any questions about steroid prescriptions.

Different people experience flare-ups differently so there is no one right way to manage them. Versus Arthritis, an UK charity, provides a free helpline you can contact to discuss flare-up management or other topics related to your arthritis. They can be contacted at 08005200520 (Mon-Fri 9am to 6pm) or by email at helpline@versusarthritis.org.



Read more about the Versus Arthritis helpline at www.versusarthritis.org/get-help

FLARE-UP RESOURCES



National Rheumatoid
Arthritis Society (NRAS) flare
management tips



National Rheumatoid
Arthritis Society (NRAS) on
contrast hydrotherapy



Versus Arthritis flare
management tips



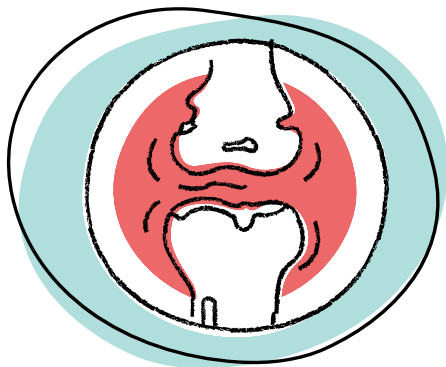
NHS Grampian flare
management leaflet

WHEN TO CONTACT THE SERVICE ABOUT A FLARE-UP

Unfortunately, flare-ups are rarely completely unavoidable if you have inflammatory arthritis. An isolated, short-lived flare-up is unlikely to require changes in your long-term treatment. Taking regular painkillers according to instructions or getting a short course of steroids from your GP can help bring a flare-up to a halt.

However, if you are experiencing regular flare-ups (more than two in a year) and these flare-ups last for longer than a week despite self-management techniques, you should get in touch with the NHS Highland rheumatology Advice Line. It is particularly important to get in touch if your flare-up symptoms such as pain and stiffness keep getting worse instead of better. On these occasions you will need to be reviewed by a specialist who may recommend changes to your treatment.

It is important to seek help if you are experiencing recurrent and prolonged flare-ups or if you feel that your joints are steadily becoming more stiff, painful or swollen. Uncontrolled inflammation in the joints can lead to irreversible damage within the joint. This can eventually cause joint deformities and functional loss.



RHEUMATOLOGY ADVICE LINE

The Advice Line is a phone service provided by the rheumatology specialist nurses which operates on **Tuesday and Thursday mornings (9 – 11.40 am)**. **You can book a slot for the Advice Line by contacting our secretarial staff on Monday, Wednesday or Friday mornings (9 – 11.40 am) on 01463704019.**

Please note that the secretarial staff will not be able to forward or answer clinical queries. The current waiting time for an Advice Line appointment is around 2-3 weeks. If you have a clinic appointment scheduled within the next month, it may be appropriate to save your queries until then instead of also attending the Advice Line.

It is important to note that the specialist nurses are only able to address topics that directly relate to your rheumatological condition. Examples of these topics include

- Recurrent or prolonged flare-ups that do not respond to self-management techniques outlined in the previous section
- Issues with your rheumatological medication such as intolerable side-effects
- Referrals to the rheumatology occupational therapist, physiotherapist or rehabilitation unit

Each Advice Line appointment lasts up to 20 minutes. Thinking ahead about the issues that matter most to you can help ensure you get the best out of your appointment. If you have several concerns, it can be difficult to cover everything in one call as we want to ensure every patient on the call list gets their allocated time.

If you would like to talk to someone about your rheumatological condition more generally, we recommend contacting the free Versus Arthritis helpline at 08005200520 (Mon-Fri 9am to 6pm). They can be helpful in addressing complex topics such as fatigue which can be challenging to fully explore in a 20-minute Advice Line appointment.

For medical issues that do not relate to your rheumatological condition, please contact your GP in the first instance. The specialist nurses are unlikely to be able to assist you with non-rheumatological matters and you may experience a delay in getting help by waiting for an Advice Line appointment. If subsequently your GP thinks your issues should be addressed by the rheumatology service, they can get in touch with the consultants directly and save you from waiting for an Advice Line appointment.

Upon calling to book an Advice Line slot, the secretarial staff may signpost you to another service (such as your GP) if they think your query would be better dealt with by them. This is done to ensure your concerns are addressed by the correct person and as quickly as possible. We thank you for your understanding.

**EXAMPLES OF TOPICS
YOU CAN DISCUSS ON
VERSUS ARTHRITIS
HELPLINE**



Read more about the Versus
Arthritis helpline at
www.versusarthritis.org/get-help

A large, stylized pink cloud graphic on the right side of the page, containing a list of topics.

Understanding arthritis
Managing arthritis
Medication and treatment
Pain management
Issues with work
Benefits available
Surgery for arthritis
Latest research
Emotional support
Available support groups
Self-help (diet, exercise etc.)

FATIGUE MANAGEMENT

Fatigue is a very common and often overwhelming symptom of inflammatory arthritis. It can affect both daily activities and emotional wellbeing, and we understand how challenging this can be. Because fatigue is usually caused by several different factors, there is rarely a simple solution. We suggest trying the following approaches to address your fatigue in the first instance.

1.WORK THROUGH THE FATIGUE MANAGEMENT PACK

Our secretaries can send you a Fatigue Management Pack by post if you contact them on 01463 706556, 01463 705443 or 01463 706842. This pack has been created by the Rheumatology occupational therapists and contains useful resources for coping with fatigue.

2.CONTACT THE VERSUS ARTHRITIS HELPLINE

The helpline is open Mon-Fri between 9am to 6pm and is free to call to from the UK. They can provide you with not just information about your condition but also emotional support and help coping with symptoms such as fatigue and pain. You can find more information about the helpline at <https://www.versusarthritis.org/get-help/helpline/>.

The National Rheumatoid Arthritis Association (NRAA) and the National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society (NASS) also have their own helplines. The numbers for these can be found at the end of this leaflet.

3.CONTACT YOUR GP

Your GP may want to test you for other conditions that may be contributing to your fatigue, such as anaemia or vitamin deficiencies.

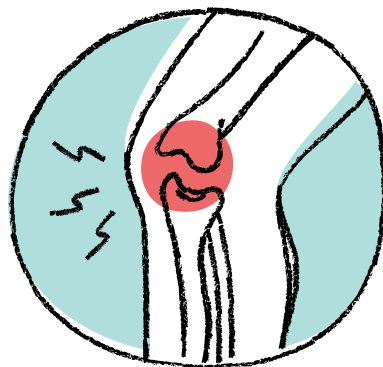
ABOUT WAITING TIMES

REVIEW APPOINTMENTS

Due to low staffing numbers, our review appointments are currently running behind schedule. This means that you are unfortunately unlikely to be reviewed by a consultant or specialist nurse at the time stated in your latest clinic letter.

We understand it can be worrying if you have not received your appointment letter when expected. Please be reassured that you will automatically be allocated the earliest available appointment, and a letter will be sent to you as soon as this is arranged. Please note that unfortunately our secretaries are not able to bring your review appointment forward if you contact the service. We sincerely apologise if your review appointment is running late.

If you start experiencing recurrent and prolonged flare-ups while waiting for an appointment, or if the pain, swelling or stiffness in your joints gradually gets worse, please get in touch with the rheumatology Advice Line.



BIOLOGICS

To manage your inflammatory arthritis, your consultant may prescribe you an injectable medication known as a biologic. These drugs are supplied by private companies and not by NHS pharmacies. On average, it may take up to 6-8 weeks for you to receive this medication once you have had your pre-screening done. It will be delivered to your home and a nurse employed by the company will come and show you how to administer the injection.

Your consultant is likely to ask you to keep taking your current medication until you receive the biologic. This should be stated in the letter from the clinic at which the biologic was prescribed. If you are struggling with your symptoms while waiting for the new medication, your GP may be able to prescribe you a short course of steroids to help control your joints. Please contact your GP directly about this.

We know waiting for new medication can feel frustrating, especially if your symptoms are difficult to manage. As biologics are supplied by private companies, unfortunately our secretarial team cannot speed up delivery. Thank you for your understanding!



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

VERSUS ARTHRITIS

www.versusarthritis.org.uk
Helpline 08005200520



NATIONAL RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS ASSOCIATION (NRAS)

www.nras.org.uk
Helpline 08002987650



NATIONAL AXIAL SPONDYLOARTHRITIS SOCIETY (NASS)

www.nass.co.uk
Helpline 02089489117



If you have an inflammatory back disease – such as axial spondyloarthritis – the National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society (NASS) runs a weekly self-help group at the Ross Memorial Hospital in Dingwall (7pm on Wednesdays, membership required). Read more about the group at www.nass.co.uk/in-your-area/nass-dingwall/

