

First Outpatient Appointment – The Rheumatology Service

Introduction

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare services nationally were impacted in the way in which they provided treatment, including routine elective services. As such patients may have to wait longer than we all would wish.

The following guidance has been certified by clinicians who are responsible for your care and should aid you as you wait to attend the hospital. This summarises for you information about the service, as well as offering information on how you can support yourself while waiting to attend your outpatient appointment.

About the Rheumatology Service

The Rheumatology department deals with conditions that involve joints, bones, muscle, and tendons (tissue that connects muscle to bone or other skeletal tissues). These conditions often arise because of problems with the immune system (autoimmunity).

City Hospital appointments are located on the second floor of the Maternity block (this is in a separate building behind the main hospital), whilst Sandwell Hospital appointments take place in the Outpatient Department on the first floor of the hospital or in the Clinical Research Facility (CRF).

Responding to changes in your condition

You can look up your condition at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/> for an overview of what you can expect or should look out for.

It is possible that your condition may change. If you think things are getting worse, or that the medicine prescribed to you has either stopped working or is no longer working as intended, you should contact your GP as soon as possible. They may wish to review you and can contact the Trust for advice and guidance from the Trust's specialist team.

If your condition worsens suddenly, you can dial NHS 111 or go to <https://111.nhs.uk/> if you believe the situation is not an emergency.

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NHS 111 staff can guide you where to get help for your symptoms, advise you if you're not sure what to do and tell you how to find general health information and advice. Including where to get an emergency supply of your prescribed medicine and how to get a repeat prescription.

They may also be able to arrange for an appointment at a medical facility near you.

In the event of an emergency or life-threatening change in condition always head to A&E or dial 999 as appropriate.

General health measures

Your mental and physical condition can also be improved by adopting a healthier lifestyle, which can help speed-up the body's healing process.

Such measures include eating healthily and making sure you have what the body needs, staying active through exercise (where your condition allows), minimising or cutting out alcohol use and stopping smoking.

More information can be found about this in our Trust's My Planned Care profile under General Health Advice.

Attending your appointment

You will receive a communication about your appointment by letter, via paperless message (text, email) or through a third-party online service partnered with the NHS (such as PSL or DrDoctor). You may also have received a pre-awareness phone call or text message to let you know your appointment confirmation is on the way or asking to check details.

Your appointment will likely be at one of our outpatient hubs at either Birmingham City Hospital or Sandwell General Hospital, however this is not always the case. Some services and clinics may be undertaken in the community at health centres, GP surgeries and other partner organisations to provide better accessibility. So even if our service 'home' is one of our hospitals, please do not assume that your appointment will take place there.

Make sure you check the date, time and location of your appointment carefully as some of them may be virtual.

If you are uncertain about when to come in and where to go, please telephone the contact number on your letter.

What you should bring to your appointment

Please read your appointment letter very carefully as it may ask you to bring certain items with you or ask you to visit another department for tests before your clinic appointment.

Please remember to bring:

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- Your appointment letter and any other information that we may have sent to you
- Any medicines or inhalers that you are taking presently
- Any samples requested by your doctor or nurse
- Information about any change in your personal details, for example, if you have a new address or a new GP
- Proof of entitlement to free prescriptions
- A small amount of money in case you need to buy a drink or snack

If you require additional assistance

We aim to respect your privacy, dignity and religious and cultural beliefs at all times during your visit. Please call the number on your appointment letter if you have any special needs, such as if you need an interpreter or signer and this was not booked at the time your appointment was originally scheduled. An interpreter can then be arranged to help you at your appointment.

Phone or virtual consultations

In the event your appointment is either a phone or virtual (online via video conferencing software) consultation, you should follow the instructions given in the message.

Make sure you are available, ready and prepared in a room or area that you will be comfortable in and will have privacy, as you will be discussing your clinical situation with your healthcare professional. If you are due to have a video call instead of a face-to-face appointment you will be given a link in advance via either text or email to join your clinician at the appropriate time.

If you cannot attend your appointment

We understand that you may not be able to attend an appointment we have arranged for you.

Whether you are unable to attend due to other commitments, are ill, your condition has improved, or you have decided not to proceed with your treatment for a personal reason, you can either cancel or reschedule your appointment at any time.

This can be done online via the form on our website, found at: <https://www.swbh.nhs.uk/contact-locations/change-your-appointment/>

You can also call the Contact Centre on 0121 507 4151 to do this, or alternatively if you have any queries about your appointment.

When using the form, please allow two working days for a response from our team. If you would like to amend an appointment for the same day, please call the relevant telephone number on your letter.

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- If you are unable to attend because you are on holiday, please ensure you provide our Trust with the dates you are away.

It is very important you let us know if you cannot attend. This allows us to rearrange things for you promptly and see if another person requiring treatment can use the vacant appointment slot. We may even contact you after your appointment date is given should a free slot become available at an earlier time.

If you do not tell us that you cannot make the appointment, you will be marked as having not attended and this may result in significant delays to your appointment, or even your case being closed for repeated no-shows.

- If you are unable to attend due to an unexpected situation on the day, please inform us of why you missed the appointment via the same form linked above so we can make sure it is noted on your records and an appointment rearranged.

Contact details

Should you require any further details about your outpatient appointment call either the number on your letter or alternatively the Contact Centre on 0121 507 4151.

You can find additional information about Rheumatology Service, including patient leaflets about specific treatments, on our website at <https://www.swbh.nhs.uk/services/rheumatology/>.

More information

There are several healthcare charities and organisations where you may also be able to receive help and guidance.

NHS.uk - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/>

GOV.UK - <https://www.gov.uk/topic/population-screening-programmes/breast>

Healthy Sandwell - <https://www.healthysandwell.co.uk/>

Birmingham City Council - https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50118/health_and_wellbeing

Mentor (Breast Implants) - <https://www.breastimplantsbymentor.com/>

Versus Arthritis (formerly Arthritis Research UK) - <https://www.versusarthritis.org/>

Lupus UK - <https://www.lupusuk.org.uk/>

West Midlands Lupus Group - <http://www.westmidlandslupus.co.uk/>

National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society - <https://nras.org.uk/>

Myositis UK - <https://www.myositis.org.uk/>

Scleroderma and Raynaud's UK - <https://www.sruk.co.uk/>

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Vasculitis UK - <https://www.vasculitis.org.uk/>

Birmingham Team - Behcets Syndrome - <https://www.behcets.nhs.uk/our-centers/birmingham/birmingham-team/>