

## First Outpatient Appointment - 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.

Please read the following information in conjunction with the staying healthy guidance and also the clinical guidelines for your specific procedure/condition.

The rheumatology department offers the following:

- A Rheumatology Day Unit
- An Early Arthritis Clinic
- A connective Tissue Disease Clinic
- An urgent review clinic
- Spondyloarthropathy Clinic
- An Osteoporosis and Metabolic bone disease clinic
- Vasculitis Clinic
- A rapid access Giant Cell Arteritis pathway

Rheumatology also has a close liaison with the Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Departments to ensure that the care patients receive is second to none.

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## Guidance for Patients

### How to access our service

If your GP feels that you need to see a rheumatologist, they will send a referral to us via the choose and book service. All referrals are triaged and prioritised by a consultant to ensure your appointment is made in the appropriate clinic. We have specialised urgent clinics for early inflammatory arthritis and a fast track service for suspected giant cell arteritis.

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 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 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.

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- 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.
- Heat and cold treatments should be applied for up to 15 minute intervals, with the exception of iced water where 5 minutes is acceptable.

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

If your health is deteriorating, you need to be seen by your GP for review and further assessment and management. If it needs urgent attention please contact NHS 111.

### **Contact Us**

UHCW NHS Trust Rheumatology Day Unit

Telephone: 024 7696 6031 (Day Unit)

Rheumatology Helpline: 024 7696 5723

Rheumatology secretaries: 024 7696 6707 and 0247696 6705

For the Rheumatology helpline it is an answerphone service for patients under the care of the Rheumatology Department at University Hospital Coventry (UH) and Rugby St Cross Hospital (RStX). Calls are listened to by the nurse Monday-Friday (except bank holidays) between 8am – 3pm. We will respond to your email within 48hrs. To leave a message please include:

- Full Name
- Your hospital number (this starts with a letter of the alphabet) or your 10 digit NHS number or Date of Birth
- Contact telephone number
- Reason for your call

### **For more support and information please visit:**

Versus Arthritis: [www.versusarthritis.org](http://www.versusarthritis.org)

National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS): [www.nras.org](http://www.nras.org)

National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society (NASSS): [www.Nass.co.uk](http://www.Nass.co.uk)

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 769 5723 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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