

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

Guidance for Patients

Rheumatoid arthritis is a long-term condition that causes pain, swelling and stiffness in joints. The hands, wrists and feet are usually affected, but it may affect almost any joint. It happens when the body's immune system, which usually fights infection, starts to attack healthy joints instead. At times symptoms can become suddenly worse causing severe pain and making it hard to go about normal everyday life. Although there is no permanent cure for rheumatoid arthritis, early treatment can help to control it and help people carry on active and full lives.

Rheumatoid arthritis can affect different people in different ways but there are things that you can do to help your condition with the help of your GP and pharmacy:



Smoking: makes the condition worse and affects how well medications work. Please seek advice from your GP or pharmacy for help in stopping.



Physical Activity: helps improve symptoms and benefits your overall health by reducing pain and joint stiffness.



Healthy diet, low in fat, sugar, salt: Staying at a healthy weight reduces extra strain on your joints, such as your hips, knees and back.



Medication: Take them as prescribed. You may need to take more than one medication as they work in different ways and can be used for different symptoms.

[Information for the public](#) | [Rheumatoid arthritis in adults: management](#) | [Guidance](#) | [NICE](#)

[About arthritis](#) | [Conditions, symptoms, treatments, support \(versusarthritis.org\)](#)

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To support local Portsmouth residents to stop smoking or lose weight, Portsmouth Wellbeing Service www.wellbeingportsmouth.co.uk has been commissioned to provide free stop smoking and weight management support to our community.

Portsmouth Wellbeing Service www.wellbeingportsmouth.co.uk are here to help you and offer different levels of support to maintain a healthy weight and to stop smoking including telephone support, virtual and app-based support options.

Stop Smoking Service The 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 just yet 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.

Weight Management Service The service supports adults aged 18 years or over who want to lose weight and have been identified as obese.

Find out your BMI

You can get help to lead a healthier lifestyle if you're an adult (18 years or over) living in Portsmouth and your body mass index (BMI) is above average. Use this tool www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator to find your BMI. If it's too high, sign up for a programme that will help you lose weight BMI of 30+.

If your BMI is 30 or higher, you qualify for free support from www.portsmouth.gov.uk/services/health-and-care/health/weight-loss-and-weight-management/

BMI of 28+

You can get free support from Healthy Lifestyles www.wellbeingportsmouth.co.uk 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 muscular skeletal disorders (back pain, mobility issues) and asthma
- you're from a black or ethnic minority background.

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BMI of 25+

If you have a Body Mass Index of 25 or higher Better Health Let's Do This – Lose Weight website www.nhs.uk/better-health/lose-weight/ 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.

Healthy eating and being active

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

- [One You Eat Better](#) (website) - includes Easy Meals app for healthy meals and the Change4Life Food Scanner to help reduce levels of sugar in your diet
- [Better Health - Get Active](#) (website) - includes tips on getting active for all, including the downloadable Active 10 app, as well as tailored advice for those living with a long-term condition
- Sugar Smart is a campaign to raise awareness of hidden sugars, recommended levels and healthy alternatives by encouraging individuals, groups, businesses, schools, and organisation to join the campaign and make a pledge. To find out how you can join in, become sugar smart and make good choices about what you, your family, colleagues eat, please visit our www.sugarsmartuk.org

What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

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.

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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. Speak to your GP or local pharmacist for advice
- 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.
- 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.

Helpful Links

Rheumatoid arthritis is one of many other rheumatology conditions. A lot more information can be found here:

Rheumatoid arthritis | Causes, symptoms, treatments ([versusarthritis.org](https://www.versusarthritis.org))

NRAS | Rheumatoid arthritis charity

[https:// National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society nass.co.uk/](https://www.nationalaxialspindyloarthritisociety.org.uk/)

Ankylosing spondylitis | Symptoms, causes, treatments ([versusarthritis.org](https://www.versusarthritis.org))

Psoriatic arthritis | Psoriatic arthritis | Causes, symptoms, treatments ([versusarthritis.org](https://www.versusarthritis.org))

The Psoriasis Association ([psoriasis-association.org.uk](https://www.psoriasis-association.org.uk))

Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Alliance (PAPAA)

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Further Help

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Arthritis UK

Website: Versus Arthritis

Telephone: 0800 5200 520

NASS National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society

Website: National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society

Telephone: 020 8741 1515

NRAS (National Rheumatoid Arthritis Support)

Website: National Rheumatoid Arthritis Support - HELP

Telephone: 0800 298 7650

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. The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Life Threatening Emergencies

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

GP surgeries are still open

If you experience an increase in pain, inability to weight bear on this limb or a significant reduction in mobility, you should in the first instance contact your General Practitioner for review and advice.

GP surgeries are still open and are working differently to how they did before the COVID-19 pandemic. GP practices continue to make best use of telephone, online and video consultations. Face-to-face appointments are still being given to those who need it.

When you phone or use an online form to contact your GP surgery to make an appointment, you will be asked some questions which are designed to help staff guide you to the most appropriate clinical person to help you with your condition. This could be a nurse, clinical pharmacist, physician's associate, GP or paramedic.

A list of GP practices with relevant contact details are available on the following website:

www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp

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My Planned Care enquiries

Contact Us

Call: 02392 681700

Email: MyPlannedCare@porthosp.nhs.uk

Website: <https://www.porthosp.nhs.uk/>

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