

Rheumatology

What to do if you have a flare



Adapted from:
NRAS Managing Well: living with rheumatoid arthritis 2009

RNHRD at RUH NHS Foundation Trust

**Coobe Park
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Phone: 01225 473408 – advice line for biologic patients

01225 428823 – rheumatology advice line

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Flare-ups

The symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis vary from person to person. They can come and go, and they may change over time. You will experience flare-ups when, from time to time, your condition worsens and your symptoms become more intense and severe. This may be fairly short term or may last weeks. A flare can include not only joint pain and swelling but also fatigue, stiffness and feeling low in mood, this can be both painful and frustrating

A flare may occur following an infection, surgery or when you are stressed. Sometimes however there is no obvious cause. Some people are able to recognize when a flare is going to happen, as their symptoms start getting worse over a period of days, but for many people they can wake up in flare with no warning, or it develops in a matter of hours.

It is possible to self-manage flares with a few days of rest, taking prescribed painkillers i.e. Paracetamol and anti-inflammatory medications i.e. ibuprofen. In some cases where the symptoms do not improve you may need to see a health care professional. This may be your GP or one of your rheumatology team to discuss treatment options. This can include short-term management with steroids or if your flares are persistent or occur on a regular basis you may need your treatment plan revisiting.

Sometimes it can help to apply an ice pack, a heat pack, or a wheat pack (you can buy these at your local chemist) to an individual joint that is causing pain but if this persists despite these measures, it is sensible to contact a member of the rheumatology team for advice. If you find an ice pack helps, be careful not to burn yourself, use a cloth to protect the skin

If flares continue to persist on a regular basis, it is important to ensure you have an appointment with your rheumatology team so that your medication can be reviewed.

If you have a flare you can contact:

- Your GP.
- The [Rheumatology telephone advice line on 01225 428823](tel:01225428823).
- This service is an answer phone service; PLEASE leave a message explaining that you have a flare.
- Please note that this service is unable to deal with emergency calls. It allows contact with a nurse specialist for advice only. Calls are answered as soon as possible, but at busy clinical periods it can take up to 48 hours to fully resolve your call.
- At times, when a nurse specialist is not available the message will advise you to contact your consultant's secretary via the main hospital switchboard on 01225 465941.