

Rheumatology

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What should I do if I experience side effects from my new treatment?

If the side effects are mild stop until the side effect settles then retry the drug

If the side effects are serious stop and contact us

2. Which vaccinations are safe for me to have with my medications?

We recommend that you have the pneumococcus vaccination (a one off vaccine) and a yearly flu vaccination. If you are on Rituximab your flu vaccination must be 4-6 weeks before your next infusion or at least 6 months after.

For a few diseases, the vaccine is in the form of a live virus. People on biologics therapy should not have live vaccinations

Examples of live vaccines are: Yellow fever and shingles.

If you are unsure whether or not to have a vaccination check with your travel nurse or rheumatology nurse first.

3. Should I stop my DMARD/biologic if I am unwell?

If you feel unwell or are on antibiotics we advise you to delay your medication. Wait until you feel better and/or the antibiotics have finished and you are infection free.

4. Bloods monitoring on biologics/DMARDs.

Regular blood tests are essential to ensure that you are safe while on your treatment. These will be monthly for the first six months and then drop to three monthly. Frequency may change if there are changes to your medication or if you have abnormal blood results



5. What are the common side effects of DMARDS/biologics

These are listed on the drug information sheet you were given

6. What do I do if I come into contact with someone who has chicken pox/shingles or get chickenpox/shingles?

If you come in contact with someone who has chickenpox/shingles:

Stop your biologic (as well as any other DMARDs) until you have spoken to the nurse specialist on 01225 428823.

Out of hours speak to your on call GP who can liaise with our medical team.

7. What do I do if I get chickenpox/shingles?

If you develop chickenpox/shingles

Stop your biologic (as well as any other DMARDs) until you have spoken to the nurse specialist on 01225 428823.

Out of hours speak to your on call GP who can liaise with our medical team. If emergency you may need to attend A&E

8. What do I do if my disease flares?

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.

If you have a flare of a single joint an injection of the joint may help

- 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.
- If you find an ice pack helps, be careful not to burn yourself, use a cloth to protect the skin.
- If this does not work it is advisable to contact a member of the rheumatology team for advice - see back page for telephone numbers



9. When is my next appointment?

If you are unsure when your next appointment is **please ring appointments on 01225 473401** (answer machine most days) and leave a message - they will ring you back. Or email ruh-tr.RNHRDOutpatientAppointments@nhs.net

10. What should I do if I am having surgery?

There are no formal guidelines regarding when to stop biologic/Anti-TNF treatment in readiness for surgery but our advice is you should let your surgeon know you are on a biologic therapy.

For most surgery patients should stop their biologic therapy 2 week prior to surgery unless you are having Rituximab: in which case we advise surgery is planned for at least 4 weeks after the last infusion.

Please call the advice line if you are unsure or need further advice.

Re-commencement of treatment can only start when the wound is healed and there are no signs of infection.

11. What should I do to avoid infections?

For advice on avoiding infections from food visit the NHS choices- food poisoning prevention webpage

www.nhs.uk/conditions/food-poisoning/prevention

Try to avoid close contact with people with severe active infections

Websites for advice/support

- Versus Arthritis homepage
www.versusarthritis.org
- NASS homepage
www.nass.co.uk
- National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society
www.nras.org.uk



Helpline Numbers

- Versus Arthritis Helpline
Tel: 0800 5200 520 (open Mon-Fri, 9am – 8pm)
www.versusarthritis.org
- NASS Helpline
Tel: 020 8741 1515 (open Mon – Fri, 9am – midday)
www.nass.co.uk/contact-us
- National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society
Tel: 0800 298 7650 (open Mon – Fri 09.30am – 4.30pm) www.nras.org.uk/helpline
- Vasculitis UK
www.vasculitis.org.uk/helpline
- SRUK, for scleroderma patients
www.sruk.co.uk/find-support/helpline