

What can I expect from my rheumatology team?

Revised April 2006



Every year over two million people visit their doctor with problems such as low back and neck pain, or swollen, painful joints. In many cases, these are the symptoms of a musculoskeletal condition. Often a doctor can diagnose and treat your condition, but in some cases they will refer you to a specialist rheumatology team. The majority of rheumatology teams are based in a local hospital, although some are based in local health care clinics.

Your rheumatology team

Your rheumatology unit has a highly trained team of health professionals who work alongside the rheumatologist to help you treat and manage your musculoskeletal condition.

Rheumatologists are doctors who have undergone specific training to become experts in diagnosing and treating arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions. The rheumatologist will work closely with you, your GP, and other specialists, to help you treat and manage your condition.

Specialist nurses will have a central role in your treatment, checking your blood test results and monitoring your treatment for side effects. They work as partners with you and your families at various stages of your treatment. The nurses may also talk to you about your symptoms to assess whether you should continue on your present course treatment or see the rheumatologist again.

Physiotherapists have specifically trained in the physical treatment of musculoskeletal conditions and work in partnership with you to enable you to achieve and maintain mobility and independence. Physiotherapists use a combination of exercise, special treatment techniques and advice to treat your condition.

The different types of treatment involve stretching or strengthening exercises, hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, relaxation, acupuncture, walking and use of hot and cold therapy (ie hot pads and cold packs. See our factsheet: Home treatment for pain relief: heated pads and cold packs).

Occupational therapists are state registered professionals who are trained to evaluate the impact that arthritis has on your daily activities. They teach people how to reduce strain on their joints in daily activities, by showing you how to modify your home and work environment. Principles of energy conservation, joint protection and stress management are taught to minimise the fatigue, stress on joints and pain that can be experienced with arthritis.

Other health professionals may also be part of your rheumatology team, such as:

Podiatrists who diagnose and treat disorders, diseases and injuries of the foot and lower leg. They are qualified to treat arthritis and play an important role in keeping people mobile. Podiatrists can help with pain management, joint protection, wound healing, basic foot health and treatment (chiropody) by providing specialist support and shoes for your feet.

Dieticians who promote good health through food and nutrition. They teach people with arthritis about different types of diet that may help with the treatment of your condition.

Psychologists who assess the individual's and family's psychological status and ability to cope with the arthritis. Based on the evaluation of this assessment, the psychologist will tailor a treatment plan to meet the psychological needs of the patient. The psychologist can also provide a wide range of interventions designed to enhance coping with arthritis, pain and stress management as well as sexual and relationship counselling and psychotherapy.

Medical social workers who provide a direct service to patients and their families, where illness, medical care and treatment are complicated by social and emotional problems. Medical social workers may use counselling skills and group work in helping to manage your arthritis.

The rheumatology team will work closely with your GP to ensure that you get the best possible treatment for your condition.



ARTHRITIS CARE

*Empowering
people with arthritis.***Note**

This information sheet may be photocopied and distributed freely on the condition that it is reproduced in its entirety and that it is not quoted without acknowledgement.

Arthritis Care

Arthritis Care is the UK's largest voluntary organisation working with and for all people with arthritis.



Our publications are just one of the many services Arthritis Care provides. These include a confidential helpline, self-management and awareness training, information for people with arthritis and health professionals, and local activity and support. We also campaign locally and nationally to help change attitudes and laws and to ensure people with arthritis have access to the treatments and services they need and deserve.

Contact us

For confidential information and support, contact the Arthritis Care Helpline

Freephone: 0808 800 4050

10am-4pm (weekdays)

Email: Helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk

For information about Arthritis Care and the services we offer, contact us at:

www.arthritiscare.org.uk

Arthritis Care UK office and England regional services:

Tel: 020 7380 6500

Central England email: CentralEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk

North England email: NorthEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk

South England email: SouthEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk

Arthritis Care in Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9448 1380

Email: Nireland@arthritiscare.org.uk

Arthritis Care in Scotland

Tel: 0141 954 7776

Email: Scotland@arthritiscare.org.uk

Arthritis Care in Wales

Tel: 01239 711883

Email: Wales@arthritiscare.org.uk