

Information for patients with suspected inflammatory arthritis (IA)

Following an assessment, your doctor suspects you may have Inflammatory Arthritis. This leaflet explains what happens next – how IA is diagnosed, how the condition is monitored and managed and steps you need to take.

Blood tests

You may have been given a form to get some blood tests done. These are important to help with diagnosis and also to have a baseline of your blood results before you start any medication. If you are started on particular medications called Disease Modifying Medications (DMARDs), you will need to have your blood tests monitored regularly. You will need to have blood tests every two weeks for the first six weeks and monthly thereafter. If the dose of your medication is increased, you need to have two weekly blood tests again for the first six weeks, before reverting back to your normal schedule. You may be able to have less frequent blood tests once you are established on your medication.

You can have bloods taken either at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Bracknell Healthspace or at West Berkshire Community Hospital. Alternatively your GP may be able to do the blood test.

You can book appointments online for the Royal Berkshire Hospital and Bracknell by visiting https://www.swiftqueue.co.uk/royal_berkshire.php or call 0300 613 4117 Option 1 (Monday to Friday). For West Berkshire Community Hospital appointments, please call 01635 273343.

Blood monitoring

If you live in West Berkshire you will have been referred to the DAWN blood monitoring service. You will need to return a consent form (which will be sent out to you in the post). This will allow the DAWN team to monitor your bloods remotely and send you further blood forms in the post. If there are any problems with your blood tests, they will contact you. If you do not live in West Berkshire, your GP will be responsible for monitoring your blood tests and you will need to make appointments at your GP's surgery to have these taken.

Imaging (X-rays and scans)

If you have been asked to have some X-rays of your joints and chest you should go to the main Radiology Department in the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Radiology is on level 2 Centre Block. You do not need a form or letter – just go in and give your name – the order will be on the system for the correct investigations. If you are unable to attend on the day you have your Rheumatology appointment, please come back as soon as you can to have these done.

You can also get your X-rays done at Townlands Memorial Hospital in Henley or at Bracknell Healthspace.

Why am I having X-rays done?

- To look for any evidence of IA in your joints.
- If you have been started on some medication you may be asked to have an X-ray of your chest – this is to check for any underlying medical conditions that could affect your ability to take the medication prescribed.

When will I get the results of the X-rays?

We will not contact you with these results routinely. The results will either be written in your clinic letter or you will be told them at your next rheumatology appointment. If there is anything of concern on the X-rays, you will be contacted by the department either by letter or telephone.

Sometimes, you will be asked to have either an ultrasound scan or an MRI scan. These types of scan can help us look for inflammation in the joints and soft tissues. You may be asked to attend a clinic appointment for an ultrasound scan, or you may be contacted at a later date to arrange an ultrasound or MRI scan.

Medication

If you have been given a prescription form for medication, you need to take this to the hospital pharmacy (Lloyds), which is on the Concourse near the Welcome Desk, level 2 Centre Block. Some medications only need to be taken for a short amount of time. However, if you have been prescribed a disease-modifying medication such as methotrexate, leflunomide, hydroxychloroquine or sulphasalazine, you will need to continue this medication longer-term. This will be explained in the plan in your clinic letter. **It is very important that you contact your GP in order for them to continue prescribing the medication for you** as you should continue to take this unless you are told to stop (or if you have problems with side effects). If you do have problems with side effects, first speak to your GP or contact us on the Rheumatology Advice Line to discuss it further.

You may have been given a steroid injection in your bottom at the appointment. This is to help manage the condition quickly while the other more long-term medication has a chance to work; this can take up to 12 weeks.

Next rheumatology clinic appointments

If you are diagnosed with IA, you will then be seen at one month and two months following your initial appointment. These appointments are usually with a specialist nurse, physiotherapist, or pharmacist. These appointments will include:

- Assessing your joints.
- Medication review to make sure your treatment is working well.
- Increasing the dose of your medication if appropriate
- Advice and information on managing your condition

Three months after your initial diagnosis you will see a doctor, who will:

- Assess your joints.
- Review your medication.
- Offer advice and answer any questions you may have

Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent

You will then be seen at six, nine and 12 months by a member of the Rheumatology Team to continue to help you manage your condition and, if possible, try to get the disease into remission. After one year, the frequency of your appointments will depend on how well controlled your condition is.

You will also be referred to the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Service's 'New2RA Right Start Service'. This service can help you:

- Better understand what RA is.
- Know how it can affect you.
- Get the right support.
- Feel more in control.
- Get a tailored pack of information that meets your personal needs.
- Talk to a like-minded person who has lived with RA.

Other important appointments

You will be referred to both our **Specialist Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Service** for an appointment with a physiotherapist and occupational therapist.

Why should I attend these appointments?

Even if your symptoms are improving, it is very important to attend these appointments as it forms part of your treatment, ensuring that you understand your condition and are able to manage it in the best possible way long-term.

Where will the appointment be?

These appointments may be face to face, usually at the Royal Berkshire Hospital or virtually, via telephone or video. We also have some appointments for occupational therapy at West Berkshire Community Hospital.

What does the appointment involve?

This may be a group session for people who have been diagnosed with the same type of arthritis or it may be a one to one session with a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist.

The sessions include:

- Information to help you understand your condition and how it is managed.
- Advice on how to deal with any stiffness or weakness.
- Advice on managing everyday activities in the best possible way
- The importance of exercise and lifestyle changes to manage the condition
- How to look after your joints.
- Fatigue management.
- Helpful hints and tips.

What can I expect as part of my treatment journey?

- Regular rheumatology appointments for the first year of diagnosis to help get your condition under control.
- Appointments with various members of the multi-disciplinary team (MDT), which includes doctors, specialist nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists and occupational therapists.
- Referrals to other specialties if required, e.g. orthotics, podiatry or orthopaedics.
- Access to our Rheumatology Advice Line – 0118 322 6574.
- Copies of your clinic letters to keep you informed of what happened in your clinic appointment and the plan going forward. Your GP will also receive copies of these letters.
- Appointments and annual reviews after the first year to help you continue to manage your condition.
- Evaluation of your condition by yourself by completing our Patient Recorded Outcome Measures (PROMs) – please see the separate information leaflet on PROMs.

Useful contacts

Versus Arthritis www.versusarthritis.org/

NHS www.nhs.uk/conditions/arthritis/

National Rheumatoid Arthritis Service (NRAS) NRAS | Rheumatoid arthritis charity

<https://nras.org.uk>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Department of Rheumatology

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