

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 and how the condition is monitored and managed.

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 have been started on some medication, e.g. methotrexate, you will need to have your blood tests monitored regularly. You will need to have blood tests every 2 weeks for the first 2 months and monthly thereafter. You may have been given some forms to do this. You can have your bloods taken either at the *Royal Berkshire Hospital, your GP, Bracknell Healthspace or at West Berkshire Community Hospital*. You may be able to have less frequent blood tests once you are established on your medication.

If you live within 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). The DAWN service will send you out blood test forms in the post and monitor your bloods remotely. If there are any problems on your blood tests they will contact you. If you do not live within West Berkshire your GP will be responsible for monitoring all of 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 RBH to have these done. 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.

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/and 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 blue prescription form for medication you need to take this to the hospital pharmacy, 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 sulfasalazine, you will need to continue this medication long-term. This should be made clear in the plan on your clinic letter. Prescriptions for any ongoing medication will be issued by your GP and the medication collected from your local pharmacy.

It is very important that you contact your GP in order for them continue to prescribe 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, which can take up to 12 weeks.

Next Rheumatology clinic appointments

If you are diagnosed with IA your next appointment is usually with a specialist nurse or physiotherapist 4-6 weeks after your initial consultation. This appointment will include:

- Assessing your joints.
- A medication review to make sure your treatment is working well.
- Advice and information on managing your condition.

Three months after your initial diagnosis you will return to the hospital to see a doctor, who will:

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

The next appointment after this will depend on how you are at the 3 month appointment.

Other important appointments

You will be referred to our **Specialist Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Service** for an appointment.

Why should you attend this appointment?

It is important that you attend this session even if your symptoms are improving, 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?

You can either attend at the Royal Berkshire Hospital or at the West Berkshire Community Hospital.

What the appointment involves

This may be a group session lasting about 2 hours for people who have been diagnosed with the same type of arthritis or it may be a one to one session with a physiotherapist and an occupational therapist.

The session includes:

- 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.
- 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, and occupational therapists.
- Referrals to other specialties if required, e.g. orthotics.
- 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.

Useful contacts

Versus Arthritis www.versusarthritis.org/

National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society www.nras.org.uk

NHS www.nhs.uk/conditions/arthritis/

Visit the Trust website www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Department of Rheumatology, August 2019

Review due: August 2021