

Rheumatoid arthritis in adults: management

Information for the public

Published: 11 July 2018

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Rheumatoid arthritis: the care you should expect

Rheumatoid arthritis is a long-term condition that causes pain, swelling and stiffness in joints. The hands, wrists and feet are usually affected, but it may affect almost any joint. It happens when the body's immune system, which usually fights infection, starts to attack healthy joints instead. At times symptoms can become suddenly worse causing severe pain and making it hard to go about normal everyday life. Although there is no permanent cure for rheumatoid arthritis, early treatment can help to control it and help people carry on active and full lives.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people with rheumatoid arthritis by making sure:

- you are offered the right medicine to slow the condition as quickly as possible after you are diagnosed, as well as medicines to ease your symptoms
- you and your doctor agree a goal to work towards so that you have good control of your symptoms – to help you reach this goal you should have regular monitoring so that your doctor can adjust your treatment if needed
- you can see a specialist quickly if you need to when your symptoms are worse
- you can have other therapies to help you live with rheumatoid arthritis, like hand exercises, advice about footwear and insoles, support with everyday tasks, and help to cope with stress and negative feelings.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, think about:

- What matters most to you – what do you want to get out of any treatment?
- What are you most worried about – are there risks or downsides to the treatment that worry you more than others?
- How will the treatment affect your day to day life?
- What other therapies could help you live with your arthritis?

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website](#) has more information about rheumatoid arthritis.

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society](#) (NRAS), 0800 298 7650
- [Versus Arthritis](#), 0800 520 0520

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by rheumatoid arthritis and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

ISBN: 978-1-4731-3004-3