Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Living well with Inflammatory arthritis

Version number: **1**
Last modified date: **12th November 2026**

Living Well with Inflammatory Arthritis Self-Management

Patient Information

Rheumatology Department

- Author ID: AJS
- Leaflet Ref: RH 003
- Version: 1
- Leaflet title: Living Well with Inflammatory Arthritis Self -Management
- Last review: June 2023
- Expiry Date: June 2025

Introduction

This leaflet sets out what you need to know to self-manage the effects of your inflammatory arthritis, and the changes you can make in your lifestyle to help you live well and healthy with your condition.

It is designed to be a simple guide to highlight some of the information and health promotion options that were discussed in your Rheumatology consultations following your diagnosis, and the subsequent education clinic appointment you attended on treatment options.

Being diagnosed with inflammatory arthritis shouldn't prevent you from living a healthy life; you should still be able to continue to work and enjoy a full healthy life.

Exercising and being active

Try to keep active; this will keep the muscles and structures surrounding your joints strong and supple and it will help maintain stamina, wellbeing and a healthier lifestyle.

Don't forget to rest when you need to especially when you are having a flare-up of your condition.

Referrals to Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy can be arranged for advice and support, including help and advice on understanding and managing fatigue and sleep.

The importance of your weight and BMI

Try to keep to a healthy weight according to the Body Mass Index (BMI) guidelines.

A healthy weight prevents pressure being put on your joints; it also allows your rheumatology medications to work more effectively to control your inflammatory disease.

Look out for the ‘Lose Weight Feel Great’ programmes in your area.

Following a healthy diet

Eat a good healthy well-balanced diet, not only to maintain your health, but to ensure your weight is controlled.

The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) for Rheumatology recommend a Mediterranean diet.

Try to stop smoking

Smoking has been proven to cause inflammation in the joints; this may lead to damage to your bones and surrounding structures.

This can make your pain worse and reduce movement and function of the joints.

Look out for Smoking Cessation programmes in your area.

Try to reduce your alcohol intake

It is advised to stay within the recommended units of alcohol.

Guidelines are now the same for men and women: 14 units per week or 3 units a day. Try to have alcohol free days within your week.

Remember…

With some rheumatology medications it is advised that you reduce your intake further or avoid alcohol.

Please refer to your rheumatology drug leaflet or speak to your rheumatology nurse specialist for advice.

The importance of taking your medications

Compliance with prescribed rheumatology medications is essential to maintain good control of your condition.

Rheumatology medications suppress your immune system, so it is important that you contact your specialist nurse if you become ill or develop an infection.

Recommended routine blood monitoring as advised by your specialist nurse is essential to ensure that your body is tolerating the medication.

The importance of having vaccinations

Rheumatology medications dampen down your overactive immune system that causes inflammatory arthritis. So, it is advised that you have your yearly flu vaccination and the one-off pneumonia vaccine to help your immune system fight against these viruses.

Antivirals are a 5-day course that is given by your GP should you develop chicken pox or shingles.

You will need to stop some rheumatology medications if you develop flu symptoms, chest infection, fever, chicken pox or shingles until you are better, and the rash has completely gone.

How important your emotional health and wellbeing can be

Living with inflammatory arthritis can sometimes have a psychological impact on your emotions and wellbeing; this can be worse if your disease is not well controlled.

A positive mind set with prescribed treatments and access to other rheumatology services can help you.

There is support that you can access; from your rheumatology team, specialist nurses, NRAS help line, Arthritiscare.org.uk and peer to peer support groups.



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