
Treatment Information

Coping with a flare of Inflammatory Arthritis

Managing a flare of arthritis

What is a flare?

Inflammatory arthritis often varies and there will be times when the arthritis will be relatively quiet and manageable. Other times a 'flare' of arthritis will result in

- an increase of inflammation
- worsening pain
- more joint stiffness

A flare is unpredictable and may start suddenly. It can last for hours, days and even months if not treated. Joint pain may be accompanied by increasing tiredness, feeling generally unwell or feverish and you may even lose your appetite.

Sometimes a flare may follow an infection, such as a chest or urinary infection. In this case it is advisable to consult your GP as you may require treatment for the infection. Some vaccinations may also cause a flare as may a period of undue stress, overwork or traumatic injury.

What can you do during a flare?

During a flare you may need to adjust some of your tablets. Taking your painkillers and/or anti-inflammatory tablets regularly should help to control the pain. **Never exceed the maximum recommended dose.** You should continue to take your other usual medications. If you are taking steroid tablets it is important that you do not alter the dose without consulting a member of the rheumatology team. Anti-inflammatory gels may be applied locally to swollen and inflamed joints.

Local treatment may be applied in the form of **heat** or **cold**, which may soothe painful joints. Where possible protect the skin with a towel before applying heat or cold to prevent burning or skin damage.

Examples of heat: - Wheat bag, hot water bottle, electric heat pad, gel pack or a warm bath or shower.

Examples of cold: - Wheat bag, bag of frozen broad beans, bag of ice cubes, gel pack or a bowl of water with ice cubes (for hands and feet).

Heat or cold treatments may be applied for up to 15 minutes at a time (with the exception of the use of ice cubes in a bowl of water, where 5 minutes would be adequate).

Rheumatology department Patient Information

What about rest and exercise?

During a flare it is important to 'pace' your activities. This means planning your day, taking into consideration your increased tiredness. You may need to take short rests between activities but it is advisable to keep your joints moving. This will help to prevent stiffness and maintain muscle tone. You may be reluctant to exercise those joints involved, but it will help to move them through their normal range of movement 2 or 3 times a day. Wearing wrist splints may help to reduce pain by keeping the joint in a neutral position. Try to avoid putting pressure through an inflamed joint.

Other ways in which you can cope

Relaxation, distraction or imagery may be helpful. This may include listening to music or picturing yourself in a pleasant environment. **Aromatherapy** may help to improve the feeling of well-being. Sometimes despite all these methods your flare may not settle – in this situation you should call the telephone advice line:

Contact Details

If you have any further questions or need advice about your treatment phone the Rheumatology Advice line on

01202 442849.

www.poole.nhs.uk/our_services/rheumatology.asp

For further health-related information, please contact:

The Health Information & Resource Centre

Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Longfleet Road
Poole
BH15 2JB
Telephone: (01202) 448003

Rheumatology Practitioners

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We can supply this information in larger print, on audiotape, or have it translated for you. A member of staff will be happy to discuss this with you. Please call PALS on 01202 448499 or the Health Information Centre on 01202 448003 for further advice