

You may need to take short rests in between activities but remember to keep those joints moving. This reduces stiffness and maintains muscle tone.

You may be reluctant to exercise flaring joints, but it will help. Wearing wrist splints may help reduce pain by keeping the joint in a neutral position. Try to avoid putting pressure through an inflamed joint.

Relaxation, distraction or imagery may help. This may include listening to music or picturing yourself in a pleasant environment.

Sometimes, despite this advice things do not settle. In this case you should email (in the first instance) Sfh-tr.rheumqueries@nhs.net or call the rheumatology team advice line on telephone 01623 676002.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Coping with a flare of inflammatory arthritis

What is a flare?

Inflammatory arthritis often varies and there will be times when your arthritis will be quite manageable. At other times a flare will result in:

- Increased swelling
- Worsening pain
- More joint stiffness.

A flare is unpredictable and may start suddenly. It can last for hours, days, or even months if not treated.

Joint pain may be accompanied by increasing tiredness, a feeling of being generally unwell or feverish and you may have a decreased 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 can increased stress, overwork or traumatic injury.

What can you do during a flare?

During a flare you may need to adjust some of your medication. Taking painkillers and/or anti-inflammatory tablets regularly should help control and minimise the pain. Never exceed the maximum recommended dose.

You should continue to take all your other medication as normal.

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 the affected joints following the manufacturer's instructions.

Local treatment may be applied in the form of heat or cold, which can soothe painful joints.

Where possible protect the skin with a towel before applying the heat or cold to prevent skin damage.

Examples of heat

A wheat bag, hot water bottle, electric heat pad, gel pack or a warm bath/shower.

Examples of cold

A wheat bag, bag of frozen peas, bag of ice cubes, gel pack or a bowl of water with ice cubes for hands or feet.

These treatments should be applied for up to 15 minute intervals, with the exception of iced water where 5 minutes is acceptable.

What about rest and exercise?

During a flare it is important to pace your activities. This means planning the day, taking into consideration your increased tiredness.