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INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Joint flares - the importance of self-care

How to protect your joints
Inflammatory arthritis is a chronic condition, which is controlled by medications. It is not uncommon for the joints to flare. However, what often triggers a flare is not clear. This leaflet aims to advise you about what to do when a flare occurs.



Take action

- **Ensure you communicate how you are feeling** to loved ones, family members and work colleagues.

- **Cold packs.** These can be applied to affected areas to reduce pain and swelling. Physiotherapists recommend resting affected joints and applying ice for 10-20 minutes. This can be applied up to four times daily.

- **Wear supports and resting splints.** These are provided by your occupational therapist (OT) to support, stabilise and settle joint pain. Once the flare has settled, reduce the wearing time of the splints, and get back into exercising your hand/wrist/fingers.

- **Try TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation)** if you continue to have severe pain. TENS therapy may be administered with a device that you can use at home. A pad that emits a small pulse of electricity is placed around the painful area to relieve the pain. Ask for advice from your physiotherapist or GP on how to use this equipment.

- **Balance periods of activity with periods of rest.** Although more rest can help during an arthritis flare, you probably do not need to abandon your regular activities, work, or exercise programme completely. To keep joints from becoming stiff, move them through the fullest range of motion possible, gradually increasing your range as the flare subsides.

- **Try alternative therapies.** Arthritis patients have found relief in practicing relaxation techniques, meditation, yoga, and acupuncture. These help during a flare by alleviating stress, relaxing the mind, and relieving pain. When you first try these therapies, becoming relaxed can seem like a nearly impossible task, but it is something that can in fact be learned.

- **Think about using a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication (NSAIDs).** Some people benefit from using these, some of which are sold over the counter. Anti-inflammatory gels and creams can also be used over flaring joints. Please don't take or use NSAIDs without consulting your GP.

- **Good and bad days** are common. Learn how to pace yourself and not to overdo it on days when you are feeling better.

- **If your hands are painful**, placing them in warm water can help. If your hands or wrists are weak, moving your hands through range and manipulating something with your hands can help maintain strength.

- **Reorganise workspaces**, such as the kitchen, so objects that are heavy and/or frequently used are within easy reach at waist or shoulder level and try to use larger joints to move and lift things.



Off limits

- **Spending long periods in bed is counterproductive**, usually prolonging your pain. Try to intersperse periods of rest with some light activity.

- **Don't do extreme exercise or activities** during the painful flare-ups. There is no thing as 'no pain no gain' in this condition. This is the time to give your joints a rest.

- **Don't place heat packs, wheat bags or hot water bottles over HOT flaring joints**. The joints are already inflamed this will only increase the process and make your joints worse. Use ice.

- **Don't smoke**, the chemicals involved in smoking can cause patients with inflammatory arthritis to flare more. Cutting down when flaring can help.

If your flare symptoms get significantly worse and you are unable to manage them please contact your GP or specialist nurse.

Contact details
Rheumatology Therapy Department
Clinic 10
King's Mill Hospital
Mansfield Road
Sutton in Ashfield
Notts
NG17 4JL

Telephone: 01623 622515, extension 2526 and 6878.
Opening times: 8am to 4pm.

Please ask your therapist for any further information or help. A variety of information leaflets on related subjects are available in the Rheumatology Therapy Department.

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.

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