

# Managing a flare of my condition

## Rheumatology

Information for patients and carers

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Caring for you

## What is a flare?

A flare is a period when your arthritis symptoms get worse. It can be due to:

- inflammatory causes (often presents as stiff and painful joints after rest, usually worse on waking and eases after exercise or activity)
- mechanical causes (often presents as stiff and painful joints after activity, often worse when standing from sitting or at the end of the day)

The goal during a flare is to reduce any joint inflammation and reduce levels of pain.

## What can I do to help my flare?

### 1. Take your medication regularly

- Use pain relief such as paracetamol, co-codamol and / or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, or naproxen if prescribed.
- Try not to wait until you have excessive pain before taking pain relief.
- Take any oral NSAIDs after food.

Consider taking some pain relief roughly 30 minutes before doing any necessary activity which you know can worsen your symptoms.

### 2. Try to pace yourself

- Balance rest with gentle activity, depending on whether you are having a mechanical or inflammatory flare.
- Ask for help from family or friends if needed, but especially during a flare.
- Prioritise tasks and break them down into 'bitesize' portions.
- Take plenty of rest periods.

### 3. Support and rest the joint

- Use pillows when resting the affected joint to support it.
- Elevate knees or feet if they are painful.

### 4. Use heat or ice

- Both can help to reduce pain and swelling.
- Use a towel to cover the source of heat or ice to protect your skin.

### 5. Consider splints for hand or wrist flares

- You may find splints useful for hand and / or wrist flares.

- Try to use them during activities rather than all the time – overuse can lead to weakness occurring in your tendons, ligaments and / or muscles.

## After the flare

Exercise is helpful once the symptoms settle. It can help to manage inflammatory arthritis because it improves overall fitness, reduces pain and fatigue. It also improves muscle strength and joint function.

If you would like some advice, you can request a referral to Physiotherapy and / or Occupational Therapy.

## When to seek help

Contact the advice line on **01925 662458** if:

- your flare lasts for more than a week of taking your pain relief at the full recommended doses
- your symptoms are completely uncontrollable after 3 days of using the methods detailed above.

The advice line answer phone is available Monday to Friday (closed bank holidays). Messages can be left between **10am and midday**, and then again between **1pm and 3pm**.