

Rheumatology Advice Line

The Rheumatology Advice Line is for patients that are already under the care of the Rheumatology Team at East and North Hertfordshire Teaching NHS Trust.

General Enquiry Line:

- Telephone 01438 285624 (Monday to Friday, 8am - 4pm)

Biologic Enquiry Line:

- Telephone 01438 284672 (Monday to Friday, 8am - 4pm)
- Email - rheumbiologics.enh-tr@nhs.net

Email Advice Line:

- Email - Enh-tr.rheumadviceline@nhs.net

What is the Rheumatology Advice Line for?

The advice line is to provide patients with access to advice and support about their condition and the medications they take. It is a **voicemail** and **email service** where we endeavour to return your call or email query within 3 working days, although this may not always be possible. Please note:

- Due to high call volumes, we will only attempt to return your call a maximum of three times.
- We are unable to discuss a patient's treatment with relatives unless the patient has given us permission to do so in advance.
- Any messages left regarding appointments will **not** be actioned. You must contact the Rheumatology Appointments Team (see page 4).

This advice line is not an emergency service. If you need urgent attention, please contact either your GP, phone NHS 111 or attend your nearest Emergency Department or Urgent Treatment Centre. **In an emergency, call 999.**

Other times when not to use the advice line

- In place of contacting your GP or to ask for urgent advice.
- To request or rearrange appointments (use appointments line*)
- To request blood test forms (contact secretaries*)
- For imaging results (contact consultants via secretaries*)

* Please see 'Useful contact details' on page 4 for all telephone numbers.

When to use the advice line?

Please use the advice line if:

- you have questions about your arthritis.
- you have a question about your medication, including side effects.

- you have a flare which has not improved after following the advice given on the leaflet.
- the rheumatology doctor or nurse have asked you to report your progress.
- your query is not answered in the FAQs (see below), or in the suggested websites for further information (page 4).

Please provide the following information on the voicemail or in your email message:

- Your (the patient's) full name and date of birth.
- NHS number or hospital number (you will find this on your appointment letter).
- A contact telephone number.
- A brief description about why you are calling.

Questions you may be asked:

- What is your current problem? What are your symptoms?
- When did the problem start?
- What self-help measures have you used to help with the problem?
- What medications are you currently taking?
- Do you have any other illness at present?
- Have you seen your GP about the current problem?

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

I am having a flare of my arthritis, what shall I do?

- Use maximum pain relief regularly, such as paracetamol and anti-inflammatory drugs, i.e. ibuprofen, if not previously advised against doing so. Ask your GP if you need something stronger if these medications do not help.
- Recent infections may flare up the joints but should settle within 2-3 days once infection/illness has resolved.
- Resting the joint or joints and using ice/heat packs can be helpful.
- If this does not improve your symptoms over a few days, have a blood test and contact the Rheumatology Advice Line.
- There is useful information about managing symptoms on the Versus Arthritis website.

Can I take anti-inflammatory medications with methotrexate?

- Yes, the combination of methotrexate and anti-inflammatories is considered safe. If you are unsure contact your local pharmacist or the Pharmacy Patient Helpline (01438 286150, 9am-4pm on weekdays).

I think I am having side effects from my medication, what should I do?

- All medications can cause side effects. It is important to report any side effects, even those not listed. Seek advice from the Rheumatology Team by contacting the advice line if you are concerned.

I have an infection/I am on antibiotics; do I need to stop my medication?

- Biologic drugs should always be stopped if you have signs of an infection and restarted once the antibiotics have finished and you start to feel better.
- Stopping DMARDs for 1-2 weeks whilst you have an infection is unlikely to lead to a flare of your arthritis, always seek advice if you are uncertain.
- Trimethoprim and co-trimoxazole (Septrin) must never be taken with methotrexate.
- Steroid tablets should never be stopped during an infection, they may need to be increased, so please discuss with your GP or contact the Rheumatology Team, if you are unwell.

What happens if I or my partner gets pregnant whilst taking disease-modifying treatments?

- It is important to notify us via the Rheumatology Advice Line immediately if you become pregnant on treatment. We will advise you if it is safe to continue with treatment or discuss possible alternatives.

What should I do if I come into contact with someone with chickenpox whilst on rheumatology medications?

- Notify your GP as soon as possible as you may need treatment with anti-viral medication (aciclovir) to minimise the severity of the disease.

I am having an operation, what do I do about my medication?

- Although it is safe to continue all DMARDs during the time of an operation, they may be stopped at the discretion of the surgeon and after discussion with the rheumatology team looking after you.
- Do not stop steroid tablets abruptly. Do not increase or reduce your dose without consultation with your GP or Rheumatology Team.
- Biologic medication should be stopped before and after surgery under the advice of your Rheumatology Team. Please contact the Rheumatology Advice Line for information on how to do this.

Why have I not received my prescribed biologic medication?

- To ensure all prescriptions for biologics can be generated without delay, please ensure you have your blood tests as agreed with your Rheumatology Team.
- Your prescription **will not** be renewed if you do not have your blood tests as instructed.
- Blood tests taken outside of the Trust may not be available for us to view and may need to be sent to us, or a blood test should be done within the Trust (Lister, New QEII or Hertford County Hospital).

Can I have vaccinations while I am on my rheumatology medication?

- You should avoid live vaccines, such as oral polio and yellow fever, while on any immune system suppressing medication such as methotrexate, sulfasalazine, leflunomide, etanercept, adalimumab, etc.
- If you are likely to require vaccinations, we would suggest discussing this with your GP well in advance of any travel dates.
- Further information about vaccinations is available from Versus Arthritis website.

Should I have the 'flu, COVID and/or the pneumonia jab?

- We recommend the 'flu, COVID and pneumonia vaccines in patients with rheumatological conditions, particularly for those patients on disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), e.g. methotrexate, sulfasalazine, leflunomide and biologic therapies.

Can I have the shingles vaccine?

- This will depend on what medication you are on and if you have previously had chickenpox. The live shingles vaccines must be avoided in patients on immunosuppressants, however, non-live vaccines such as Shingrix is available; please discuss with your GP. If you require further information, please contact the Rheumatology Advice Line.

I might have shingles, what should I do with my rheumatology medication?

- You will need to stop your immune system suppressing medication, such as methotrexate, leflunomide and biologic medication, and make an urgent appointment with your GP for treatment with acyclovir.

Further information

- **Versus Arthritis** www.versusarthritis.org
Helpline 0800 5200 520 (Monday to Friday, 9am - 6pm)
- **National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society** www.nras.org.uk
Helpline 0800 298 7650 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am - 4.30pm)
- **National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society** www.nass.co.uk
Helpline 020 8741 1515 (Monday to Friday, 10am - 4pm)
- **Psoriatic Arthritis Association** www.psoriasis-association.org.uk
Helpline 01604 251620
- **NHS Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC)** www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk

Useful contact details

East and North Hertfordshire Teaching NHS Trust:

- Website www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk
- Telephone 01438 314333

Rheumatology Appointments Team:

- Telephone 01438 284444

Pharmacy Patient Helpline:

- Telephone 01438 286150 (Monday to Friday, 9am - 4pm on weekdays)

Secretary Telephone Numbers:

Dr Axon

- Telephone 01438 283457 (Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri)

Dr Brown

- Telephone 01438 285629 (Wed, Thurs and Fri)

Dr Ellis

- Telephone 01438 284473 (Mon, Tues, Wed and Thurs)

Dr Joy

- Telephone 01438 284473 (Mon, Tues and Wed)

Dr Marianayagam

- Telephone 01438 284128 (Tues, Wed, Thurs and Fri)

Dr Wijeyekoon

- Telephone 01438 286120 (Mon, Tues and Wed)

Secretaries' Email Address: rheumsecretariesenh-tr@nhs.net

Leaflet information

**You can request this information in a different format or another language;
please speak to your doctor or nurse.**

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