How to get the best out of your rheumatology appointment
Information for patients
There are two reasons why coming to your Rheumatology appointment is important. Firstly, it is a good opportunity for your medical team to examine you and make a decision about your ongoing treatment. Secondly, it is your opportunity to ask any questions you may have about your diagnosis, treatment or ongoing care.

This leaflet will give you information which you can use to prepare for your appointment. This should help make sure it is as useful to you as possible.
What should I do before the appointment?

It is worth keeping a brief record of how your arthritis has been between appointments.

• Make notes of the times when you are finding life difficult – especially thinking about how bad your pain and fatigue are. You could try giving the pain and fatigue scores out of 10 (1 being very painful or tired and 10 having no pain/tiredness) or noting how your symptoms have affected your life and activities.

• Think about what it is you would like to achieve in the short and long term and try to sum this up on paper, ready for your appointment.

• Write down anything you need advice on or questions you would like to ask.

    For example:

    “My main problem is …”

    “I am having a problem with …”

    “Can you tell me more about …?”

Think about bringing someone with you to your appointment for reassurance or you if you think you may find it difficult to remember everything that is said. If English is not your first language it may be a good idea to bring along someone who can translate.
What do I need to do during the appointment?

Please bring your appointment letter with you and check in at the reception desk in the outpatients department. You may be seen by a doctor, specialist nurse, or physiotherapy practitioner. All of these people are experienced in Rheumatology.

We try to keep the clinic running on time, however it is difficult to plan how much time each person will need. This may mean you may have to wait for a short time to be seen.

To help the Rheumatology Team decide on the best course of treatment for you, please bring your YELLOW CARD showing your blood test results and a copy of your CURRENT PRESCRIPTION or list of medication you are taking.

When you come for your appointment you can use your notes to help you briefly describe your symptoms.

Do not be afraid to ask the medical staff at your appointment to repeat or explain something that you do not understand. You may find it helpful to make some notes so you can remember what has been said.
What happens after the appointment?

If the Rheumatology Team feels that you need another appointment, you will be able to book this before leaving the department.

Within two to three weeks of your appointment you should receive a copy of the letter which has been written to your GP. This will help remind you of what was discussed during your appointment and any changes to your treatment.

If you are unsure about any of the information you have been given, please contact the Rheumatology Adviceline on 01865 737 656.

This is a message service; please leave an answerphone message and a contact telephone number. Your call will be returned by one of the specialist practitioners as soon as they can.

**Useful sources of further information about arthritis:**

- A range of leaflets in the waiting room.
- Trusted internet sites such as:
  - The National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (www.nras.org.uk)
  - Arthritis Care (www.arthritiscare.org.uk)

**IMPORTANT:**

If you are unable to come to your appointment, please phone the Appointments line on:

Tel: **01865 737 333**

This will allow you to rearrange your own appointment and means your previous appointment time can be given to someone else.
What do you do if don’t feel satisfied with your appointment

Not all consultations go smoothly for a number of reasons. If you feel you are not receiving appropriate care and support, you can contact the Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS) to discuss any problems you may feel you have experienced. Please see the back of this leaflet for contact details.

Remember, the hospital team welcomes feedback and needs to know if something does not go right, so they have the opportunity to change things for the future.
These hints were compiled by members of the Rheumatology Patient Group supported by NRAS. This group is run by Rheumatology patients for patients, their family, friends and carers. Meetings are held every two months at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre. For further information and details of meetings please speak to the Rheumatology Team or phone NRAS on:

Tel: **0845 458 3969**

Email: **www.nras.org.uk**
If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473 or email PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk

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