Coming to the rheumatology outpatients clinic

Visiting rheumatology outpatients

In the rheumatology department we see patients who have been referred by GPs or from other hospital departments.

Rheumatological problems are very common indeed. Most of us will have a rheumatological problem at some time in our lives, such as a tendon problem in the shoulder or a sports injury or arthritis.

Most rheumatological problems are perfectly well managed by general practitioners and the rest of the team in primary care and never need to be seen at a hospital. If your GP feels it would be helpful he can refer you to a rheumatology department.

Appointments

If your GP refers you to our department you will be sent an appointment letter for one of our outpatient clinics. Most of these take place in Clinic 5 at Addenbrooke’s Hospital, but we also hold clinics at Newmarket Hospital, Saffron Walden Hospital and Princess of Wales Hospital, Ely.

Who will I see?

The letter will tell you which clinic you will be seen in but will not say which member of the team will be seeing you. All clinics are led by a consultant.

Within each clinic the consultants work alongside junior medical staff, rheumatology practitioners and spinal triage physiotherapists. Rheumatology practitioners are senior nurses or physiotherapists who have had additional specialist training in rheumatology. Spinal triage physiotherapists are senior physiotherapists who have particular expertise in the management of spine problems.
What will happen when I visit outpatients?

After you have registered at the reception desk a nurse will show you where to sit and wait. New patients should bring a urine specimen for testing and may be invited to be weighed and have their height measured.

New patients should also bring all their medications. Patients attending follow-up appointments should always bring an up-to-date list of their medication.

We try to keep to time but that is not always possible. Some problems can take longer to sort out than others. We ask you to be patient and understanding. The clinic nurses will keep you informed if there is any delay.

You are welcome to bring a relative or friend with you if you wish.

Will I need any tests?

That depends on your problem. Sometimes no tests are needed. The person who sees you in clinic will discuss with you any investigations which are necessary. Blood tests and plain x-rays can normally be done at your clinic visit. Scans and other special tests can be done by appointment at a later date.

What about treatment?

Of course that depends on the problem. One important aspect of your visit is that you will be given information about your condition and you will have the opportunity to ask questions.

Sometimes medication is appropriate in which case you may be given a prescription or advised to contact your own GP for a prescription.

In some cases, the medication prescribed will need careful monitoring, usually by blood tests with your GP. In this case you will be given a monitoring booklet to record the results from these blood tests.

In some circumstances injections can be helpful: injections into joints or muscle may be done in clinic but for more complicated injections such as epidurals a later appointment may be needed.

Sometimes you will be referred for physiotherapy or to the occupational therapy department.