

# Coping with Flare Ups

A 'flare up' can be described as an increase in symptoms above your baseline (usual) symptoms. It is normal for a long term condition and does not necessarily mean it is not under control. In the case of inflammatory arthritis it may involve warm, swollen joints that feel painful and stiff. The duration can vary from hours, to days or weeks. They are sometimes associated with fatigue and a low mood. It is important that you recognise 'flare ups' early, manage them appropriately, and give them sufficient time to settle.

## Management strategies

### Medication:

Medications can be taken to help ease the pain and inflammation. Ask your GP or local pharmacist for advice.

**Exercise** - It is important to continue gentle exercise as you feel able during a 'flare up' to maintain joint range of movement and function.

**Heat and Ice** - The use of heat can help with pain and muscle relaxation. Use a warm water bottle, or microwavable wheat bag, following the instructions provided when you purchased it. To protect your skin from heat burns, wrap the item in a few layers of towel. Leave in place for 10-15 minutes. It can be reapplied after 2 hours if you wish.

The use of ice can help with pain and inflammation. Use crushed ice cubes or a bag of frozen peas. Protect the skin from an ice burn by placing the ice pack in a wet towel. Leave in place for 10-15 minutes. It can be reapplied after 2 hours if you wish. It's normal for the skin to become pink with either heat or ice, however if you experience discomfort or a burning sensation remove the item immediately. Don't apply heat or ice packs if you have poor skin sensation or poor circulation, if you are diabetic or over areas of infection.

**TENS** \*- (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation) is a small, battery operated machine that can help to ease pain - you can discuss this with your health professional or local pharmacist. **Note that TENS may not be suitable for everyone.**

**Relaxation** - there are many techniques that can help relax the body and mind, such as breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, mindfulness and guided imagery.  
See 'Relaxation techniques'

**Sleep management** - sometimes your sleep can be disturbed during a flare up, which may affect your energy levels - it is important to normalise your sleep pattern as soon as possible. You can find some helpful tips in 'Getting a Good Night's Sleep'.

**Positive thinking** - Pain can affect your mood and conversely, if you are low in mood, this can affect your physical symptoms and you may experience more pain. It can be helpful to focus on the positive things in life and to continue with activities.

**For further advice speak to a Healthcare Professional or GP**

**Web Address:**

<http://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/physiotherapy-outpatients/patient-careinformation/>

**QR Code:**

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**If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :**

Physiotherapy Department  
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary

Telephone: 01484 342434

MSK physiotherapy Admin Office

Telephone: 01484 905380

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**If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.**

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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