Inflammarory Arthritis
Managing a ‘Flare’

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?
Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to or after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

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If you require a translation of this leaflet please call xxxxx xxxxxx.
Managing a Flare

Hints and Tips:

Flares of Inflammatory Arthritis (IA) can affect 1-2 joints or several joints at one time. Flares can occur at any time and can last for a few hours to several days. Flares can be due to the inflammation or can be ‘mechanical’ where pain is caused by damaged joints. Inflammatory pain can be worse in the morning after inactivity whereas mechanical pain is often worse after repeated use of the affected joint.

How to manage a flare can depend on which joints are affected and whether it is inflammatory or mechanical, but the overall aim is to reduce pain and any inflammation. People with Inflammatory Arthritis often know the best way to manage their own symptoms, but here are some tips which may help to manage a flare:

- To avoid the pain building up ensure you take your painkillers (analgesics) on a regular basis.
- Take your anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) if prescribed on a regular basis also, making sure you take them with or after food to reduce irritation of the stomach.
- Try to rest the joint(s) affected. It may be helpful to elevate the joints such as the knees or feet if possible as this may help with both mechanical and inflammatory pain. Using pillows to support the neck and shoulders may also make these joints more comfortable. If pain is associated with inflammation rest can help but it is also important to put the joints through a range of movements to reduce stiffness. Take your analgesics (painkillers) about 20 mins before you try to do this.
- Use warmth for stiff, painful joints. A heat pad or hot water bottle is ideal but ensure it is covered to avoid scalding the skin. The use of a shower or bath, if you are able, will help with stiffness and allow more movement of the joints.
- If you have hot, swollen joints then use a cold pack to reduce the heat and swelling. Again protect the skin with a towel/cloth when using cold packs. Do not use cold packs on the back of the neck.
- Use any splints you have been provided with for hand or wrist flares. If you find them uncomfortable to wear all the time, try and wear them for short periods during the day especially if you need to perform any functions which affect these joints.
- Ask for help if you can. Do not try and do everything yourself. Recognise that you need to try and pace some activities when you are having a flare. Prioritise your activities and only do what you really have to.
- Joint pain is often helped by strengthening the muscles which support the joints. If you would like advice about this, please ask about suitable exercises or whether a physiotherapy referral may be beneficial. A leaflet regarding hand exercises can be obtained from either phoning the helpline or by contacting the Occupational Therapists.
- Trying these hints and tips can help with flare management but please phone the helpline for advice if your flare persists for more than 2-3 days or if you are having repeated flares.