

Inflammatory Arthritis Education Series

Communicating with Your Healthcare Team

This program has been reviewed and endorsed by



Canadian Arthritis
Patient Alliance

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Objectives

By the end of the session, you will:

- Understand the importance of being an active participant on your own healthcare team
- Know the roles of each member of your healthcare team
- Learn effective strategies for how to communicate with your healthcare team and participate in shared decision making

Meeting Your Healthcare Team

Meeting your healthcare team

Communicating with your entire healthcare team can make dealing with and controlling arthritis more manageable

You are the centre of your healthcare team, which may also include one or more of the following health care providers:

- Primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner), rheumatologist, pharmacist, nurse, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, social worker, massage therapist, dietitian, ophthalmologist, chiropractor, naturopath, psychologist.
- Family, friends and clergy may also play a part in your healthcare.

Introduction to communication

Learning you have arthritis can be an isolating and overwhelming experience

- With arthritis, you may seem okay on the outside, but you often experience extreme pain, fatigue and difficulty just moving

Arthritis is not discussed much in the media or in social settings

When diagnosed with arthritis, we often choose not to communicate what we are going through to families, friends, colleagues, employers, or even doctors

Getting the most out of visits

Healthcare providers (HCP) see many patients in a day

Making the most of your time with your HCP requires:

- Planning on your part
- Knowing what to expect
- Communicating effectively
 - Some tools to help you prepare for your appointment can be found here:

<https://arthritispatient.ca/talking-with-my-healthcare-provider/>

If you need more time, request it when you book your appointment

Before the visit

Write it down

- Make a list of reasons you're seeing this HCP (symptoms, questions, prescription refills)
- Consider if this HCP is the best member of the team to answer your question
- Prioritize your list so you can tell your HCP what's most important to you for that visit

Recruit a friend or relative to:

- Help get to the appointment
- Take notes
- Ask questions
- Act as an interpreter

Communicating effectively

Build rapport

Review list of reasons for visit

Set an agenda

**Get ready for the clinical
exam**

Create a treatment plan

Communicating effectively

Step 1: Build rapport

HCP are people too

- Taking a few moments to connect can help set a positive tone

Break the ice

- Your HCP may do this with a non-medical question about you
- You can do this if your HCP does not

Don't overdo it

- Long personal exchanges could get in the way of an effective visit

Communicating effectively

Step 2: Review list of reasons for visit

Tell your HCP you've made a list and ask to go over it together quickly

- Talk with your HCP about which issues are most important to you and him/her at this particular visit

Use positive and open language:

- Create a sense of working together

Communicating effectively

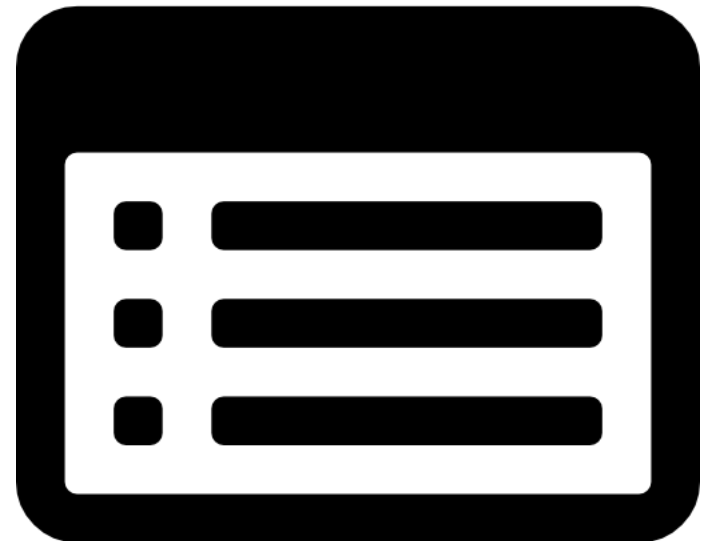
Step 3: Set an agenda

There is often not enough time to address all of your concerns at each visit

Setting priorities will ensure most important issues are covered

Tell your HCP which 2 or 3 things on your list are most important to you, ask if he/she agrees based on his/her expertise

Avoid getting side-tracked or off topic



Communicating effectively

Step 4: Get ready for the clinical assessment

Your HCP needs to investigate your symptoms

Answer questions honestly

Express fears and concerns openly

Avoid “clamming up” during the exam



- Communicating properly will help you and your HCP make well-informed decisions about your care
- Having a friend or family member in the room can help prompt or remind you of details of answers/responses

Communicating effectively

Step 5: Create a treatment plan

Being involved in your own treatment will provide a greater sense of personal control and will contribute to better outcomes

Review your agreed upon treatment plan in regards to medications, exercise, diet, stress management, etc.

Ask your HCP to make note of any problems you weren't able to discuss at this visit

Don't leave before you really understand your HCP's instructions/reasons for decisions



Information to always share with your HCP

- A current list of your medications and any dietary supplements you are currently taking
- Any new medications for other conditions
- Any medication side effects you're experiencing
- How you have felt since the last visit, especially if there was a change in medication
- How often you have missed or whether you have stopped taking any medications
- Date of most recent blood work, tests or x-rays
- Any recent changes in general health, especially illnesses, infections or hospitalizations
- Dates of any planned surgeries, dental work or travel

Information to always share with your HCP

- If you are experiencing any feelings of prolonged sadness or difficult emotions
- If you feel you need to see other healthcare providers (e.g. allied health professionals including occupational therapist, physiotherapist, pharmacist, dietician or other medical specialist)
- What questions you want answered at this visit

Your primary care providers (PCPs)

Physician or nurse practitioner

- Provides advice and care for most of life's common illnesses (including rheumatic disease)
- Most likely to first hear about your symptoms and diagnose arthritis
- Will be able to handle most of your questions about mild-to-moderate arthritis
- Is the coordinator of your care; work together to develop trust and effective communication

Your rheumatologist

- People with inflammatory arthritis should be referred to a rheumatologist
- Rheumatologists are specialized in the diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of rheumatic diseases
 - Diagnose and assess severity of arthritis
 - Prescribe and monitor medications
 - Order tests to track disease progression and medication effects
 - Access other team members to facilitate your care

Your rheumatologist

Specific information that your rheumatologist may ask for:

- A log that includes information on:
 - Length of time of morning stiffness
 - Level of pain on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 = no pain to 10 = worst pain)
 - Level of fatigue on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 = no fatigue to 10 = extreme fatigue)
 - What joints or areas of the body are tender or swollen
 - Any change in activities that you are now able or unable to do

Your pharmacist

- An often overlooked but valuable member of your healthcare team
- Using one pharmacist (or one location) allows him/her to keep a complete record of your prescriptions and recognize possible drug interactions
- Helps you understand your medications and the risks and benefits of their use
- Tell your pharmacist about any troubling symptoms as these may be medication side effects
 - Can advise if immediate medical attention is necessary

Your nurse

- Provides counselling/education and emotional support for health concerns such as understanding the disease process, treatment options, medications, pain and stress management etc.
- Administers and monitors the effects of medications
- Teaches patients to self-inject medications (if required)
- Provides referrals to community resources and/or other healthcare providers (in some provinces)

Your physiotherapist

- Assesses your physical abilities based on a detailed examination of joint swelling, pain, range of motion, muscle strength, flexibility, aerobic function, balance and coordination
- Develops a customized program for your needs
 - Prescribe exercises and provide specific treatments (physical interventions, posture recommendations, mobility devices, general fitness recommendations)
- Provides referrals when needed to other healthcare providers or community services (in some provinces)

Your occupational therapist

- Even mild arthritis can cause problems with daily activities
- You may need help or advice regarding activities such as:
 - Dressing, bathing, grooming, toileting
 - Household chores, meal preparation
 - Shopping, going to work
 - Communication and coping strategies
 - Sexual activity
- Can develop a program to help protect your joints, decrease fatigue and increase your independence
 - Offers advice on ergonomic design of your home/workplace
 - Offers advice on hand/wrist splints, orthopedic shoes, orthotics and other daily living aids

Your social worker

- May deal with quality-of-life and emotional issues
- Can help link you with services you need from governments/agencies/organizations
- Assists your family members
- Your doctor or other healthcare professionals can refer you to a social worker, and you can also self-refer

Your dietitian

- Provides information about:
 - Questions regarding diet and arthritis
 - Possible food interactions with medicine
 - Healthy target weight
 - Losing, maintaining or increasing weight
 - Preparing food and shopping for groceries for healthy, well-balanced meals
- Anyone can be called a “nutritionist”
 - A qualified (registered) dietitian has a university degree in nutrition science and is registered with a provincial association

Your ophthalmologist

- Ophthalmologists specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of eye conditions
- Eye problems can be associated with various forms of arthritis (and the medications used to treat them)
- Inflammatory arthritis can cause:
 - Inflammation in/around the eyes
 - Dry eyes (which can lead to infection)
- Ask if you are at risk for eye problems, and know how to recognize the warning signs and what to do

Your podiatrist and chiroprapist

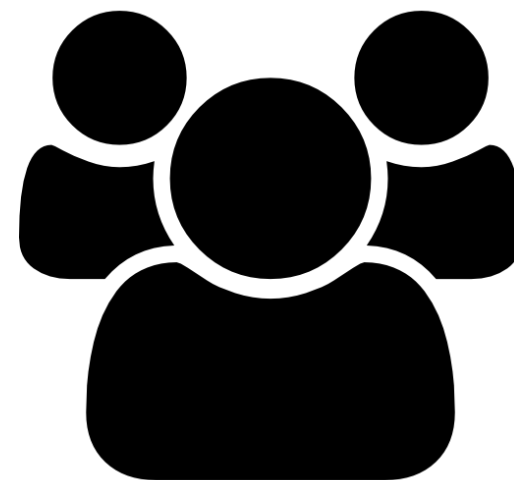
- Most minor foot problems (calluses, corns, high/low arches, plantar fasciitis) are easily treatable
- Minor surgery and non-surgical care can be done by podiatrists/chiroprapists
- Provide assistance with nail care if reaching is difficult
- Provide orthotics and footwear recommendations
- Services are often covered by provincial health plans or by extended healthcare plans

Your orthopedic surgeon

- The majority of people with arthritis will never require surgery
- Referral to an orthopedic surgeon may or may not mean you will need surgery
 - The surgeon may recommend continuing current treatment and later returning for a re-assessment
- Sometimes, damage to bone/cartilage requires surgical repair
- If you do require surgery, you may be placed on a waiting list
 - Talk with your healthcare team about what you can do to cope with your symptoms while waiting for surgery

Key Messages

- You are the centre of your own healthcare team
- Managing your arthritis may involve input from various professionals who form your healthcare team
- Prepare ahead for each visit with any member of your healthcare team
- Never hesitate to ask questions or ask for a referral to another healthcare provider
- Know who to contact if a problem develops



Resources

Arthritis Consumer Experts	www.jointhealth.org
The Arthritis Foundation	www.arthritis.org
The Arthritis Society	www.arthritis.ca
Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance	www.arthritispatient.ca
Canadian Psoriasis Network	www.cpn-rcp.com
Canadian Spondylitis Association	www.spondylitis.ca
Rheuminfo	www.rheuminfo.com
Canadian Medical Association	www.cma.ca
Canadian Nurses Association	www.cna-nurses.ca/cna
Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists	www.caot.ca
Canadian Physiotherapy Association	www.thesehands.ca
Dietitians of Canada	www.dietitians.ca