

Getting the most out of your specialist

Time with your rheumatologist is valuable, and being well-prepared for your appointment is easier than you realise says Dr Martin of Auckland Hospital's Rheumatology Department.

In this article, Dr Martin shares tips and tricks to help you get the most out of your time with the person who manages your arthritis treatments. The goal of your rheumatologist is to help relieve your symptoms and enable you to get on with living your life.

Many people experience arthritis and need treatment, so clinics are often very busy says Dr Martin. "During your appointment our focus is to ensure you, as a patient, are getting the best therapy for your condition."

"The more time we have to talk about how you are functioning day-to-day, the better we can work with you to reduce symptoms and in turn improve your mobility and quality of life.

"Arriving 15 minutes before your appointment gives you time to fill out forms telling us about your health before we see you. This frees up clinic time so we can assess you thoroughly."

When you are seen, sometimes all your joints may need to be examined, says Dr Martin. "A lot of useful information is gained by checking joints that aren't painful and also your nails – so please remove nail polish before your appointment."

"Wearing loose clothing with few layers for ease of removal means you spend less time getting undressed in order to look at the joints we need to check. We then have more time to talk about your symptoms, assess how you're doing and what your quality of life is like."

It's important to be honest with your specialist about how you are doing, says Dr Martin. "Better understanding of how you are managing your arthritis day to day helps us figure out if your treatment schedule is working as best it can for you."

Dr Martin also emphasises the need to bring your medications with you or a list of what you are currently taking. "People often forget to do this as they believe the medication list is on our hospital records. The reality is that different doctors in the hospital and in general practice make changes to your medications and it is not always accurately reflected on your records. People also don't always take what is prescribed so it is really important we have an up-to-date list from you of what you actually take every day."

Dr Martin recommends bringing a support person along to your appointment. "We sometimes give patients a lot of information to digest and a diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis or lupus can be a shock to people so having a friend or relative there can help support the patient and be a second pair of ears."

It's also important to allow enough time to get to your appointment says Dr Martin. "Hospitals are busy places and traffic and parking can be unpredictable. We want to ensure all patients get the care they deserve and, after we noticed many patients had to wait because others were running late, we introduced a standard lateness policy in our Auckland clinic. This means that anyone who is over 15 minutes late needs to make another appointment. Unfortunately as our clinics are so busy that can be several months away.

"Due to our extensive wait list we take it very seriously when patients don't attend an appointment. After all, this is a missed opportunity to see someone in need. We allow a reschedule once but if you

fail to attend clinic for two occasions in a row you will need to be referred once again by your GP before you can receive another specialist appointment.

“Please let your clinic know at least a few days ahead if you think you cannot make your allocated appointment as there is often a long list of people waiting to get last minute slots.”



Key tips for making the most of your appointment:

- Allow plenty of travel time
- Arrive early
- Wear loose clothing
- Always remove nail polish
- Know your medications
- Write your questions down
- Bring a support person.

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