

What's new in Rheumatology 3

Some of the new information and major changes included in *Therapeutic Guidelines: Rheumatology, version 3*.

The Rheumatology guidelines have been extensively revised by the expert writing group for this edition. The guidelines highlight the importance of collaborative, multidisciplinary care in the management of patients with rheumatological diseases, for conditions primarily managed by the general practitioner as well as those primarily managed by the specialist. The need to assess and proactively manage cardiovascular disease risk factors and other comorbidities is also emphasised.

A practical approach to **assessing peripheral musculoskeletal symptoms in adults** is outlined, and accompanied by guidance on the judicious use of investigations and imaging. Helpful vignettes and two new figures are included to illustrate patterns of musculoskeletal involvement, extra-articular features and risk factors associated with specific rheumatological conditions.

The challenge of making a definitive diagnosis in the early phase of an inflammatory polyarthritis is addressed in the topic on **undifferentiated arthritis in adults**. This topic provides advice on specialist referral as well as an approach for managing patients before specialist consultation. A new topic is included on **viral arthritis**, an important differential diagnosis in patients with inflammatory polyarthritis.

Two new topics provide clinicians with practical advice on managing pharmacological therapy for rheumatological conditions. **Principles of immunomodulatory drug use** outlines an approach for managing adults treated with immunomodulatory therapy, including steps to take before starting therapy. Significant drug-specific considerations are addressed in handy tables. Principles for using nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) in adults, including advice on NSAID choice, are outlined in the topic on **principles of analgesic and anti-inflammatory drug use**.

Gout is increasingly common, but is often poorly managed in general practice. The gout topic highlights the need to confirm the diagnosis with joint aspiration, and to treat patients with confirmed gout with lifelong urate-lowering therapy using a treat-to-target approach.

The topic on **osteoarthritis** explains changes in the understanding of the disease pathogenesis and highlights the fluctuating nature of symptoms. Management is focused on establishing individual patient goals, taking a trial approach to the use of interventions, and regularly assessing interventions against the patient's goals. Evidence on the use of a range of management interventions is discussed.

Urgent specialist referral and timely commencement of disease-modifying therapy is crucial for patients with **rheumatoid arthritis**. Even in patients with well-controlled disease, pain is common. A new section is included on assessing patients' pain and managing residual noninflammatory pain.

Expanded guidance is included on performing antinuclear antibody testing in patients with a suspected **inflammatory connective tissue disease** using a two-step approach. The common clinical dilemma of a patient with **mild, nonspecific symptoms** is addressed.

Most patients with acute nonspecific **low back pain** require minimal intervention and symptoms resolve with patient education and reassurance of favourable prognosis. Assessing prognosis is discussed in a new section. Detailed advice is given on lifestyle management, including the importance of staying active. Evidence for analgesic drugs to treat nonspecific low back pain is also addressed. The **neck pain** topic includes new sections on cervical radiculopathy and cervical myelopathy. There is also a new topic on **thoracic spine (upper back) pain**. For patients with spinal pain, a useful table highlights alerting features of serious pathologies.

The topic on **fibromyalgia** includes a list of discussion points to give practitioners confidence in explaining the diagnosis to their patients, as well as new options for pharmacological therapy.

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