

Education for people with inflammatory arthritis

INTRODUCTION

Patient education is a planned interactive learning process designed to support and enable people with inflammatory arthritis to manage their life and optimise their health. Patient education activities include giving help and advice on healthy living and how to stay well. Receiving patient education helps people to manage their own illness and to have better health and well-being.

EULAR recommendations give advice to doctors and patients about the best way to treat and manage diseases. EULAR has published in 2015 recommendations on patient education for people with inflammatory arthritis. Inflammatory arthritis is a group of conditions where the joints become stiff and painful due to the immune system attacking the body's own tissues and causing inflammation. The main conditions include rheumatoid arthritis, spondyloarthritis/ankylosing spondylitis and psoriatic arthritis.

Doctors, nurses, health professionals and patients worked together to develop these recommendations. Including patients in the team ensured that the patient point of view was integrated in the recommendations. The authors looked especially at the evidence on what type of patient education is provided, who provides it and how it is provided. They also looked at the evidence on how well patient education works.

WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW?

The concept of patient education has changed over the years. In the past, patient education meant that doctors provided information and patients were passive recipients of this information. Nowadays, patient education means more than just giving information, and patients are encouraged to be more involved in decisions about their care. Patient education can improve people's knowledge and ability to cope with their disease.

WHAT DO THE RECOMMENDATIONS SAY?

The recommendations fall under two main principles. The first is that patient education should be interactive and designed to support people in managing their disease and to improve their health and quality of life. The second is that communication and shared decision-making are essential. This means that patients should have a say in their treatment and management of their disease and be encouraged to take decisions with their doctor and other health professionals.

Overall, there are eight recommendations. Each recommendation is based on available scientific evidence or expert opinion. The more stars a recommendation has the stronger the evidence is and the more important it is that you and your doctor follow it.

One star (*) means it is a weak recommendation with limited evidence.

Two stars (**) means it is a weak recommendation with some evidence.

Three stars (***) means it is a strong recommendation with some evidence.

Four stars (****) means it is a strong recommendation with a lot of evidence.

- **Patient education should be a part of normal care for people with inflammatory arthritis.******
This will make sure that you understand your disease and that you are involved in your care and decisions about your treatment. Informed patients are more likely to be able to manage it.

- **Patient education should be offered more than once.****
You should get patient education when you are first diagnosed, and again each time you change your medicine or if your health condition or personal needs change.
- **The content of patient education should be designed according to the needs for each person.******
The patient education you get should be tailored to your personal needs and expectations. Some people will want to know more about certain aspects of their disease than others.
- **Patient education might be given in a variety of different ways.******
Some people might respond best to one-to-one education, while others might learn best in a group or online, and further support. Phone calls or written materials may also be needed.
- **Patient education should be based on theory and evidence.******
Some patient education may be supported by scientific evidence or educational theories. Others may be based on ancient practices such as yoga or meditation. The aims of each are to improve well-being.
- **Patient education should be evaluated.***
Patient education programmes should be evaluated. When the evaluation is done, the outcomes used must reflect the programme objectives.
- **Patient education should be delivered by health professionals e.g. doctors, nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists and/or trained patients as part of a team.****
It is important that the people giving patient education are trained in proper techniques.
- **People providing patient education should be trained and maintain their knowledge and skills.****
It is important that the people giving patient education are trained and have the right knowledge and skills in order to provide high-quality education.

Overall, the recommendations say that it is important for you and your doctor or health professional to work together to manage your disease and get the best possible results from treatment. If you have an inflammatory arthritis these recommendations will give you some guidance on what to expect from providers of patient education.

If you have any questions or concerns about your disease or your medication, you should speak to your doctor or a health professional involved in your care.

This is the patient version of the EULAR recommendations for patient education in people with inflammatory arthritis. The original publication can be downloaded from the EULAR website: www.eular.org.

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