

## Understanding your referral to rheumatology

### Why am I being referred?

Some people with inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis, can also have inflammatory back pain.

### What is inflammatory back pain?

Back pain is very common but in most cases the pain is said to be 'mechanical' - that is, related to the way the muscles, ligaments, discs and bones work together. For a small number of people, the pain is due to inflammation and sometimes means that people have inflammatory arthritis in the spine called ankylosing spondylitis or axial spondyloarthritis (AS). It is important to identify these people as there's a lot of good treatments that can help.

### What are the symptoms of AS?

Typically, AS:

- Starts before the age of 40
- Has lasted for at least 3 months
- Has come on slowly over time
- Is worse in the mornings
- Causes stiffness in the mornings
- Improves with exercise, and is worse with rest
- Improves with anti-inflammatory medication (e.g. ibuprofen)
- Can wake people from sleep, often in the second half of the night

### How is AS diagnosed?

It's important to be referred to a rheumatologist, a hospital specialist dealing with bones and joints. They can diagnose whether or not you have AS. Tests your rheumatologist might do include:

- A physical examination to assess your flexibility and joint tenderness.
- Blood test to measure markers of inflammation.
- Blood tests to look for the HLA-B27 gene which can be associated with AS.
- X-rays will show if there has been any changes to your bones and joints.
- Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) will show if there is any inflammation around the joints in your spine.

If you would like to chat to someone about your referral and visit to a rheumatologist, you can contact the National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society Helpline

020 8741 1515 or email [asknass@nass.co.uk](mailto:asknass@nass.co.uk), open 9am to midday, Monday to Friday

Or visit [www.nass.co.uk/getting-my-diagnosis](http://www.nass.co.uk/getting-my-diagnosis)

