



Simple Tasks

SHOULD I REFER TO A RHEUMATOLOGIST? Early Warning Signs of Inflammatory Rheumatic Diseases

Over seven million Americans suffer from inflammatory rheumatic diseases, and that number jumps to over 50 million when you include osteoarthritis. With numbers this large, prioritizing referrals can become difficult.

Signs of a rheumatic disease can be symptomatic of different disorders and can be difficult to identify. To help you prioritize your referrals, here are some red flags to watch out for:

1.	Presence of swelling in the joints, especially multiple joints
2.	Weakness, such as new onset difficulty rising from a chair, along with elevated ESR and creatine kinase
3.	New blue or white color changes in the fingers and toes, particularly with ulcers
4.	New headaches, with or without visual disturbance, and an elevated ESR
5.	New fixed swelling and tightness of the skin of the hands and feet
6.	New butterfly rash and joint pain (or fevers)
7.	Elevated ESR with joint pain, swelling, fevers, rash, or weakness
8.	Sudden wrist or foot drop, with fevers and rash
9.	Morning stiffness lasting more than 45 minutes
10.	Back pain that is worse in the morning, better with activity

People with rheumatic diseases have a short window of opportunity (just 12 weeks from symptom onset for some). By ensuring timely and appropriate referrals, you will help your patients with rheumatic diseases get early and aggressive treatment within their window of opportunity. Visit the “Take Action” section of SimpleTasks.org to find your window of opportunity to help.





Learn more about the importance of referring to a rheumatologist →

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THE IMPORTANCE OF REFERRING TO A RHEUMATOLOGIST

Why to refer?

More about the Window of Opportunity

While the over 30 types of inflammatory rheumatic diseases have varying symptoms, they all share one common element: the first weeks and months following the onset their symptoms are known as the “window of opportunity.” It is crucial that patients get appropriate treatment in that time period to avoid long-term complications.

The benefit of referrals

The Specialists in Rheumatic Diseases

Early and appropriate referral to a rheumatologist can result in many benefits for you and your patients, including:

- Reducing medical costs
- Saving time and money on unnecessary tests/surgery
- Overall health improvement
- Reducing disability
- Reducing impact on family members and co-workers

How you can help

Referring a patient with symptoms to a rheumatologist is an essential component in first rate health care. You can help over seven million Americans suffering from rheumatic diseases by referring patients with prolonged inflammation and other rheumatic disease symptoms to a rheumatologist. By working together, you can maximize your patients’ window of opportunity, and dramatically improve their prognosis and quality of life.

Visit the “Take Action” section of SimpleTasks.org to find your window of opportunity to help. To find a rheumatologist in your area, check the American College of Rheumatology's directory at www.rheumatology.org/directory/geo.asp.

There’s not a rheumatologist in my area. Now what?

If you are having trouble with the referral process, please e-mail Erin Latimer at elatimer@rheumatology.org



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