

Know about your

DISEASE ACTIVITY SCORE

DAS



Understanding
Rheumatoid Arthritis

A patient guide to better treatment



Personal Information

Name:

.....

Contact details:

.....

.....

Emergency contact details:

.....

Name of consultant:

.....

Treatment info: *I have rheumatoid arthritis and currently I am taking... (name of treatment)*

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Your doctor or nurse will consider a lot of information when assessing your treatment. They will want to know about your symptoms and how the condition affects your body and your every day life. This helps them to decide whether your treatment is still right for you. They will use different techniques to assess your RA, one of these is known as DAS.

DAS stands for 'disease activity score' and is a measurement of rheumatoid arthritis.

This booklet will help you to understand what DAS is.

You may want to take your wallet card with you to appointments with your doctor or nurse.



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Introduction

Do you feel that your rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is under control? Do you have any or all of the following symptoms despite being on treatment: fatigue, morning stiffness, loss of appetite, flu-like symptoms, difficulty in moving your joints because they are painful, tender or swollen?

RA can often be well controlled with treatment. However, it is vital that these treatments are assessed on an ongoing basis to make sure you are getting the maximum benefit from them.

What is DAS?

DAS stands for 'disease activity score', it is a number that measures your RA. Your doctor or nurse will calculate your DAS using a special calculator, based on several tests. These include the number of tender and swollen joints you have, an assessment of how you feel your condition is and results of your most recent blood test.

Why is it important to know about your DAS?

Your DAS is a measure of your RA and how well it is responding to treatment. Treatments can ‘switch off’ the inflammation associated with RA, slowing down or sometimes even stopping the joint damage that causes pain and disability. Deciding on the best treatment to control the disease for each person is important. The table below shows what the combined score that makes up your DAS represents:

DAS	How your DAS is interpreted
Less than 2.6	Disease remission
2.6 to 3.2	Low disease activity
More than 3.2	May merit change in therapy for some patients
More than 5.1	Severe disease activity

How will your DAS affect treatment of your rheumatoid arthritis?

The goal of treatment is to be symptom free. However, this may not be possible for everyone. The earlier your disease is diagnosed and treatment started, the greater the potential for remission.

Your DAS is a reflection of how well your disease is being controlled. The DAS helps your doctor or nurse to consider whether you might need a treatment change. This may involve increasing, decreasing or even stopping the dose of a particular treatment. It may also involve starting a new treatment or giving a steroid injection. Current treatments include traditional disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) and the biologic therapies which are given either by self-administered injection under the skin (like a diabetic would give themselves insulin) or by intravenous drip. Your doctor or nurse can tell you more about the treatment options available to you and which ones they believe to be most appropriate.

Sometimes, factors other than the symptoms of RA can affect your DAS, for example, if you are suffering with

another illness at the same time. However, your doctor or nurse should be able to recognise this and help to treat those symptoms separately.

What is remission and is it achievable?

Remission is when the signs and symptoms of RA disappear and remain that way over a significant period of time. Some people may achieve remission on their current treatment, but the best treatment for one person may not be the best for someone else. Your treatment goals and expectations should be agreed between you and your doctor or nurse.

How else is your rheumatoid arthritis measured?

Other investigations include ultrasound, physical examinations, blood tests and X rays. It is important that your doctor or nurse works with you to ensure that your management plan does work well for you. Drug treatment is very likely to be part of this but physiotherapy, occupational therapy or sometimes even surgery may be offered.

What happens if you have other problems that aren't assessed by DAS?

Pain and fatigue are not measured in the DAS but your doctor or nurse should take these factors into account and document them. Equally heart or lung problems related to RA may be additional factors that your doctor or nurse will consider when assessing your treatment benefit.

Not all joints are assessed by DAS. When you are being assessed you should tell your doctor or nurse what other problems you might have so that they can record these. Changes in your treatment (for example if you have recently started or stopped steroids) will need to be considered when assessing your DAS. It is very important also to mention any symptoms which you think might be side effects related to your current treatment.

How often should your DAS be measured?

Your DAS should be measured as often as it is helpful to determine the best treatment regimen for you.

As such, the required frequency of measurement may vary widely from one individual to another. It may be done at every clinic visit and in some circumstances, for example when being assessed for your suitability to receive biologic therapies (discussed previously), an extra clinic visit may even be required specifically to measure DAS. In other cases, it may not need to be done so often.

Keeping track of your DAS

You may wish to ask your doctor or nurse what the recorded DAS measurement is when they assess it. This will allow both you and your medical team to understand the management of your disease and the expectation you have from treatment. If you do not think you have had an assessment of your DAS, you might like to ask your doctor or nurse if it would be helpful to measure it and, if so, to record it.

Remember – your DAS should be stable and as low as possible.

Record of DAS

Your doctor or nurse can use the table below to record your DAS. You may also find it useful to note the date and time of your next appointment.

Date of next appointment	Time of next appointment	DAS

For further copies of this booklet, please contact the NRAS helpline on: 0800 298 7650 or visit: www.nras.org.uk/DAS

A 'Know about your DAS' DVD is also available to request or download from the NRAS website.

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