

COVID-19 & AiArthritis Resource
March 30, 2020

Should I stop taking my medications?



The answer, in short, is NO, this is a decision that must be made between you and your doctor, based on any unique situation you are experiencing that may warrant a change in your treatment plan.

But what if I am immunocompromised?

Our diseases are the result of overactive immunity so not all people living with AiArthritis diseases are immunocompromised. Most are as a result of taking medications – like biologics, prednisone, and conventional disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) e.g. methotrexate) – which can lower our ability to fight infections. This virus is new, starting in China in December 2019. Therefore, there is not enough information at this time to suggest those on these medications should stop using them.

What we do know is that these medications keep diseases under control and if uncontrolled many problems may arise, such as having disease activity heighten.

When we flare we are more susceptible to contracting infections and we know that uncontrolled inflammation is very hard to contain and turn around if it goes untreated. This is why we, and other nonprofits, are fighting to make sure those on hydroxychloroquine do not lose access to their treatments as the current supply is being used to help those with COVID-19.

Additionally, due to the massive impact of this virus on health care systems, it could become difficult to see your doctor(s) if a quick intervention would become necessary due to severe flaring. In saying this, every patient is unique. **Given the complexity of balancing these considerations and the need for tailoring any response to the individual patient, all decisions need to be made by the treating rheumatologist or rheumatology professional in consultation with the patient in question.**

Credible Advice

Here is a piece written by Dr. John Cush – known rheumatologist who specializes in Still's Disease. ***"It is important to counsel patients to NOT stop their anti-rheumatic, analgesic, anti-inflammatory, DMARD or biologic therapies. These are given to manage symptoms***

and/or to reverse inflammation or immune dysregulation. The message should be that uncontrolled disease is a much greater risk (because it would promote inflammation and immunosuppression) than the therapies we prescribe.”

<http://rheumnow.com/content/rheumatic-disease-drugs-and-covid-19>

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR), European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR), British Society of Rheumatology, Canadian Rheumatology Association, French Rheumatology Society, Italian Society of Rheumatology, and Pediatric Rheumatology European Association do not recommend stopping treatments without speaking to your doctor.

<https://www.rheumatology.org/Portals/0/Files/ACR-Infusion-Guidance-COVID-19.pdf>

https://www.eular.org/eular_guidance_for_patients_covid19_outbreak.cfm

<https://www.rheumatology.org.uk/News-Policy/Details/Covid19-Coronavirus-update-members>

<https://rheum.ca/cra-updated-statement-on-covid-19-march-17-2020/>

<https://sfr.larhumatologie.fr/actualites/reponses-patients-du-21-mars-covid-19>

<https://www.reumatologia.it/cmsx.asp?IDPg=1087>

<https://www.pres.eu/news/newsstory.html?id=29>

Our resources

The AiArthritis Voices 360: COVID-19 & AiArthritis Special Series

As we navigate through this COVID-19 pandemic, the rheumatology community has been uniting to ensure consistent messaging and up-to-date resources are available to patients around the world. New information is changing daily, even hourly. In some locations, people cannot obtain testing, so if symptomatic, they must assume they are positive and

isolate. While this is responsible, it does not help research efforts to better understand this virus, and in particular, how it affects those in the rheumatology community. There are many questions and concerns we have - as immune-compromised patients who are looking for information and resources to stay informed.

Our organization is actively involved in many collaborative efforts worldwide, alongside other nonprofits and rheumatology professionals, to keep on top of the impact of COVID-19 in the AiArthritis community. To do our part, we are inviting all of these stakeholders to join us in discussions on our AiArthritis Voices 360 talk show platform, so you can be connected to the conversations we are having and to the data we are obtaining daily about this virus. We will also be collecting resources from these stakeholders and developing our own, which will be based on your questions and concerns.

- **Visit the website at <https://www.aiarthritis.org/covid19> to find COVID-19 resources and links to listen to the associated AiArthritis Voices 360 COVID-19 show.** You can also listen by subscribing to the show anywhere you listen to podcasts.
- **Join us in the @IFAiArthritis Facebook COVID-19 & AiArthritis group.** In addition to additional resources not found on the website, in this group you can ask questions, meet the show Co-Hosts, and join conversations about each episode we air on COVID-19. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/IFAiArthritisCovid19/>

Remember, the International Foundation for **Autoimmune & Autoinflammatory** Arthritis (AiArthritis) is led by people living with these diseases. We are living with the same questions and concerns as you are, and therefore, you can trust we are dedicated to finding the answers we all need.