



## Pain-Free Living: When to Call a Rheumatologist

Rheumatology is a specialized branch of medicine that focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of diseases that affect the immune system and the musculoskeletal system, including joints, muscles, and bones. Medical professionals who specialize in this field are known as rheumatologists. These highly-trained physicians help manage a wide range of conditions that can cause pain, inflammation, and reduced mobility.



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### Five Common Rheumatic Conditions:

#### Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic autoimmune disease that primarily affects the joints, causing inflammation and damage to joint tissues.

#### Symptoms:

**Joint Pain:** RA often causes pain, stiffness, and swelling in multiple joints, usually in a symmetrical pattern (both sides of the body). Commonly affected joints include the wrists, knees, and fingers.

**Morning Stiffness:** Many people with RA experience prolonged morning stiffness, which can last for hours and significantly limit joint mobility.

**Systemic Symptoms:** RA is a systemic disease, meaning it can affect various organs and systems in the body. Systemic symptoms may include fatigue, fever, weight loss, and muscle weakness.

**Joint Deformities:** Over time, untreated RA can lead to joint deformities and damage to cartilage and bone, resulting in decreased joint function.

#### Lupus (Systemic Lupus Erythematosus or SLE)

Lupus, specifically systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), is an autoimmune disease that can affect various parts of the body, including the joints, skin, kidneys, and internal organs.

#### Symptoms:

**Joint Involvement:** Arthritis is a common symptom, leading to joint pain and swelling.

**Skin Rash:** Many individuals with lupus develop a distinctive butterfly-shaped rash on their face. Other skin rashes are also possible.

**Systemic Symptoms:** Lupus is systemic and can cause fatigue, fever, weight loss, and organ damage.

#### Myositis

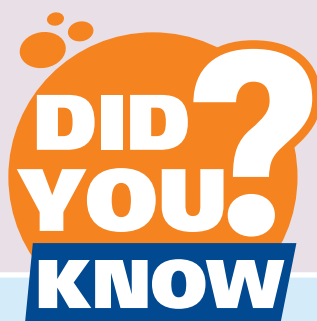
Myositis refers to a group of rare conditions that can cause muscles to become weak, tired, and painful due to inflammation.

#### Symptoms:

**Muscle Weakness:** People with myositis may have difficulty performing everyday activities due to muscle weakness.

**Muscle Pain:** Myositis can cause soreness in the affected muscles.

**Fatigue:** People with myositis can feel unusually tired.



#### Seronegative spondyloarthropathies

are a family of joint disorders that include ankylosing spondylitis, psoriatic arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease-associated arthritis, reactive arthritis, and undifferentiated spondyloarthropathies.

Early diagnosis is crucial to limit disease-related disability.

#### Gout

Gout is a form of arthritis caused by the buildup of uric acid crystals in the joints, leading to sudden and severe pain. It is primarily caused by elevated levels of uric acid in the blood, which can result from dietary choices and genetic factors.

#### Symptoms:

**Acute Pain:** Gout often manifests as sudden, intense pain in the affected joint, commonly the big toe.

**Swelling:** The affected joint becomes red, swollen, and tender during a gout attack.

**Chronic Gout:** If left untreated, gout can lead to the development of tophi, which are lumps of uric acid crystals under the skin.

#### Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis and is characterized by the gradual breakdown of joint cartilage, leading to joint pain and stiffness. OA is primarily associated with aging, joint overuse, joint injuries, and obesity.

#### Symptoms:

**Joint Pain:** OA causes joint pain, typically worsening with activity and improving with rest. It often affects weight-bearing joints like the knees and hips.

**Stiffness:** Joint stiffness, especially after inactivity or in the morning, is a common OA symptom.

**Loss of Range of Motion:** OA can limit the normal range of motion in affected joints.

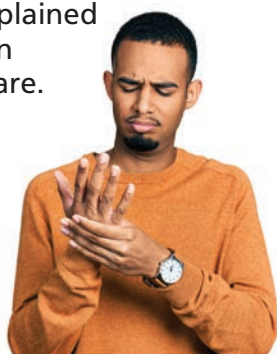
**Bone Spurs:** In response to cartilage damage, the body may develop bone spurs, which can contribute to pain and joint deformity.

### When to Make an Appointment with a Rheumatologist

**Persistent or Recurrent Joint Pain:** If you experience persistent joint pain, especially if it lasts for more than a few weeks, it's essential to consult a rheumatologist so they can determine the underlying cause of your discomfort. If you have a history of recurrent joint pain or arthritis flare-ups, a rheumatologist can help identify triggers, manage your condition effectively, and work with you to prevent future episodes.

**Unexplained Swelling and Stiffness:** Unexplained swelling and stiffness in your joints may indicate an inflammatory condition that requires specialized care.

**Family History:** If you have a family history of autoimmune or rheumatic diseases, it's essential to be proactive about your health. Discuss your family history with a rheumatologist so they can assess your risk and recommend appropriate screenings or preventive measures.



"If you are not living your life to the fullest due to joint pain, stiffness, fatigue, or other symptoms, consider making an appointment with a rheumatologist. Timely intervention can help you get the right diagnosis and treatment," said Sabina Ratner, MD, rheumatologist, Division of Rheumatology, Saint Peter's University Hospital. "As a rheumatologist, I take great pride in treating my patients and helping them feel better. I chose my specialty because I was fascinated by the complexity of the conditions rheumatologists treat and find it very rewarding when we can help and improve the lives of our patients."

Dr. Ratner treats patients with autoimmune conditions and other diseases of the joints, muscles, and bones. She specializes in diagnosing and treating conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, lupus, scleroderma, Sjogren's disease, myositis, polymyalgia rheumatica, giant cell arteritis (GCA), arthritis, gout, pseudogout, and osteoporosis.



# Saint Peter's University Hospital Named to Newsweek's Inaugural America's Best-In-State Hospitals List

Saint Peter's University Hospital, a member of Saint Peter's Healthcare System, has been named to Newsweek's list of America's Best-In-State Hospitals 2024. This prestigious award is presented by Newsweek and Statista Inc., the world-leading statistics portal and industry ranking provider. The rankings were based on a nationwide online survey of healthcare professionals (who were not permitted to recommend their own hospital or employer); patient surveys; hospital quality metrics from Medicare and Medicaid Services; and a Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs) Implementation survey conducted in 2023 by Newsweek and Statista. This is the first time Newsweek has released a "Best-In-State" Hospitals List.

Proximity and access are of the utmost importance when choosing between top hospitals and the America's Best-In-State Hospitals 2024 ranking was created to identify the top hospitals at the state level. Hospitals from all states were eligible for the ranking and included in the nationwide survey. The 25 states with the most hospitals according to the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) were surveyed individually. The remaining states, including New Jersey, were grouped into 4 regions: Northeast, Midwest, West, and South. Leading hospitals from these states were considered accordingly. Four data sources were used for the evaluation:

**Nationwide online survey:** Over 10,000 medical professionals (doctors, hospital managers and healthcare workers) were asked to recommend the best hospitals (in and out of state) based on their expertise.

**Quality Metrics Data:** Data from Medicare and Medicare Services available for Mortality, Safety, Readmission, Experience, Timely & Effective Care was considered.

**Patient Experience:** Cleanliness of the hospitals and quietness, communication of the nurses/doctors and staff responsiveness, care transition, medicine communication, and discharge information.



**Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs) Implementation survey:** To account for the increasing importance of Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs), which come from voluntary surveys completed by patients to measure their perception of their functional well-being and quality of life, according to Statista. PROMs data is used to optimize the care process and support therapeutic decisions in real-time.

The final scores were weighted on peer recommendations (32.5 percent in-state and 7.5 percent out-of-state), patient experience (17.5 percent), hospital quality metrics (40 percent) and implementation of standardized Patient Reported Outcome Measures, or PROMs (2.5 percent).

"Saint Peter's University Hospital is honored to be one of only nine New Jersey hospitals to be named to this prestigious list," said Leslie D. Hirsch, FACHE, president and CEO of Saint Peter's Healthcare System. "Recognition from an external authority such as Newsweek speaks volumes about Saint Peter's team of dedicated physicians, nurses, healthcare providers and support team, all of whom share a common goal—to provide exceptional health care delivered with warmth and compassion, reflecting a bedside medicine that mirrors how we'd want our own family members to be treated."

## Community Calendar

For more information or to register for a program, call the contact number listed or visit [saintpetershcs.com/events](http://saintpetershcs.com/events). Most programs are FREE unless noted; please call for information.

### Cancer Support

**Bone Marrow Transplant**  
For patients who have had an allogeneic transplant  
Call for information: 732.235.8522

**Breast Cancer**  
Call for information: 732.235.7011

**Gynecologic Cancer**  
In partnership with the Cancer Support Community  
Central New Jersey  
Call for information: 732.235.6792

**Living with Cancer**  
Call for information: 732.235.7557

### Diabetes Education\*

For information about classes, call the numbers listed below.

**Diabetes Self-Management Education**  
Call for information: 732.339.7630

**Gestational Diabetes Self-Management Education**  
Call for information: 732.339.7630

**Prevent T2 Program**  
Call for information and registration: 732.339.7772

**Saint Peter's Virtual Urgent Care**  
Monday – Friday  
5 to 10 p.m.  
Saturday & Sunday  
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
[saintpetershcs.com/virtualurgentcare](http://saintpetershcs.com/virtualurgentcare)

### Parent Education

Some parenting classes are being held online. Register at [saintpetershcs.com/ParentEducation](http://saintpetershcs.com/ParentEducation). Once registered for a class, access information will be provided to you. For information about the following classes, please call Parent Education at 732.745.8579.

**Baby Care**  
**Birth Center Class**  
(for moms under midwifery care)  
**Breastfeeding Class**  
**Breastfeeding Support Group**  
**Grandparents Class**  
**Hypnobirthing**  
**Marvelous Multiples**

**New Daddy Class**  
**New Mom Support Group**  
**Prenatal Yoga & Exercise Class**  
**Prepared Childbirth/Lamaze Classes**  
**Sibling Class**  
**Spinning Babies**

**VIRTUAL TOY DRIVE**  
BENEFITING THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AT SAINT PETER'S UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

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### Support Groups

**Bariatric Nutrition Support Group**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month  
Next meeting: December 8 • 6 – 7 pm  
Call 732.339.7450 for Zoom meeting information

**Bereavement**  
Call Pastoral Care for information: 732.745.8565

**Craniofacial Teen Girls**  
Call for information: 732.745.8600, x8113

**MyGoal Autism Family**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month  
Next meeting: December 10 • 3 pm  
Call 877.886.9462 or email [info@mygoalautism.org](mailto:info@mygoalautism.org) for virtual meeting details

**SHARE**  
3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month  
Next meeting: December 21 • 7 – 9 pm  
Call 732.745.8522 or email [imariano@saintpetersuh.com](mailto:imariano@saintpetersuh.com) for Zoom link

**Spouse/Partner Caregiver Support Group**  
Call for information: 732.745.8600, x8653

**COVID-19 Vaccines**  
For age eligibility and clinic locations and dates, visit [saintpetershcs.com/covidvaccine](http://saintpetershcs.com/covidvaccine)

Need a doctor? To find a Saint Peter's physician, visit [saintpetershcs.com/findphysician](http://saintpetershcs.com/findphysician).

Online scheduling is also available with select Saint Peter's Healthcare System physicians via Zocdoc at [BookMySPDoc.com](http://BookMySPDoc.com)

This calendar is for information only. Do not rely on it to make healthcare decisions on your own; instead, talk with your healthcare provider for advice and treatment. Do not ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something you read here. We do not suggest or endorse that you have any tests, use products, or use other information in this document without advice from your healthcare provider.

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