Rheumatoid arthritis: referral, diagnosis and investigations

Adult with suspected persistent synovitis

Are:
- the small joints of hands or feet affected, or
- more than 1 joint affected, or
- 3 months or longer between onset of symptoms and seeking medical advice?

NO

YES

Refer urgently to specialist care

Refer to specialist care

Investigations
- Offer to carry out a blood test for rheumatoid factor.
- Consider measuring anti-cyclic citrullinated peptide (CCP) antibodies in people who are negative for rheumatoid factor.
- X-ray the hands and feet.

RA diagnosed?

NO

Consider alternative diagnoses

YES

As soon as possible (unless already measured to inform diagnosis):
- Measure anti-CCP antibodies.
- X-ray the hands and feet.
- Measure functional ability (e.g. using HAQ) to provide a baseline for assessing the functional response to treatment.

See summary of recommendations on management and monitoring

This is a summary of the recommendations on referral, diagnosis and investigations from NICE's guideline on rheumatoid arthritis. See www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG100