Spondyloarthritis

This sheet has been written for people with a spondyloarthritis (sometimes called spondyloarthropathy or seronegative arthritis). It provides general information to help you understand what spondyloarthritis and seronegative arthritis are. It describes the main types of these conditions and how they are managed. This sheet also tells you where you can find further information.

What is a spondyloarthritis?
‘Spondylo’ means affecting the spine and ‘arthritis’ means joint disease. Spondyloarthritis is a name for types of arthritis that commonly affect the spine. These types of arthritis all have the following signs in common:

- inflammation of
  - the spine and sacroiliac joints (joints that connect the base of your spine to your pelvis), felt as pain and stiffness in the buttocks, back and/or neck
  - joints in the legs and less commonly the arms, causing pain, stiffness and swelling
  - tendons (strong cords that connect muscles to bones) and ligaments (which connect bones to each other), often felt as pain in the back of the heel or underneath the foot
  - eyes, skin and other parts of the body
- seronegative (see below)
- associated with a gene called HLA-B27.

Another name used for this group of conditions is spondylitis, meaning inflammation of the spine. There are several types of arthritis that can be classified as spondyloarthritis.

What does seronegative mean?
The word seronegative means ‘absent from the blood’. Types of arthritis that test negative for rheumatoid factor in the blood are called seronegative arthritis.

What is rheumatoid factor?
Rheumatoid factor is made by the body’s immune system. It is found in people who have rheumatoid arthritis (RA) but is not normally present in healthy people. Only one out of 100 people have rheumatoid factor without having RA. Rheumatoid factor is found by doing a blood test. Cases of arthritis that test negative for rheumatoid factor can be called seronegative arthritis.

Why is my condition sometimes called spondyloarthritis and sometimes seronegative arthritis?
These names are often used to describe the same types of arthritis. Your condition may be classified as a spondyloarthritis, even if your spine is not affected. These types of arthritis all test negative for rheumatoid factor so they can also be described as seronegative arthritis. It can be very confusing having so many names for your arthritis. It doesn’t really matter if you and your doctor call your arthritis seronegative, spondyloarthritis or spondylitis, as long as you understand what it is.

What are the main types of spondyloarthritis?
There are several types of arthritis that are grouped together, under the name spondyloarthritis. These include:

- ankylosing spondylitis: causes inflammation of the joints in the spine. See the Ankylosing spondylitis information sheet.
There are several types of arthritis that are called spondyloarthritis. Learn about your type of arthritis and your treatment options.

For more information:

Websites
- Australian Rheumatology Association - information about medicines and seeing a rheumatologist www.rheumatology.org.au
- The Arthritis Research Campaign www.arc.org.uk
- American College of Rheumatology www.rheumatology.org
- Arthritis Foundation (US) www.arthritis.org
- Spondylitis Association (US) www.spondylitis.org

Crohns & Colitis Foundation (US) www.ccfa.org
National Association for Colitis and Crohn's Disease (UK) www.nacc.org.uk
National Psoriasis Foundation (US) www.psoriasis.org
Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Alliance (UK) www.papaa.org

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Your local Arthritis Office has information, education and support for people with arthritis

Freecall 1800 011 041 www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

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