

## Deutsche Rheuma-Liga: How we can help you

### Association

The Deutsche Rheuma-Liga (German Rheumatism Organisation) serves the interests of persons suffering from rheumatism. The self-help organisation has over 300,000 members. The rheumatism organisation's regional and members groups assist locally.

### Advisory services

The Rheumatism Organisation provides information and advice to persons suffering from rheumatism, independently and free of commercial interests. The organisation works in the fields of politics, society and research to promote the interests of persons suffering from rheumatism.

### Telephone

Do you have any questions? Are you looking for support? Use our **telephone hotline: 01804-600000**. One call costs 20 cents, regardless of its duration. When using a mobile phone, the call costs 42 cents at the most. You can contact the German Association for Bechterew's Disease (Deutsche Vereinigung Morbus Bechterew e. V.) at the telephone number: 097 21-22033.

### Internet

On the Internet at [www.rheuma-liga.de](http://www.rheuma-liga.de) and [www.bechterew.de](http://www.bechterew.de) patients can find a great deal of important information, including a map of providers with a list of specialist physicians and therapists, plus tips for physical exercises.

## The disease can also involve the following

### Joints and tendon insertions

Not only the spine, but also the knee, ankle joints, finger or toe joints can swell and be permanently painful. In addition, different tendon insertions (e.g. heels) can be affected. It's important to consult a doctor as quickly as possible in such an event.

### Bowel

In some cases, patients suffer from other diseases simultaneously, or at a later date, for example, chronic inflammatory bowel disease (including Morbus Crohn or colitis ulcerosa). Patients suffer from diarrhoea and in some cases painful intestinal cramps.

### Skin

In some cases, patients have scaling, itchy skin on some parts of the body (psoriasis).

### Eye

In some cases, the iris of the eye becomes inflamed (iritis or uveitis). Pain occurs in one eye, the eyes redden and suffer from increased sensitivity to light. If such symptoms are present, an eye doctor should be consulted immediately to avoid permanent damage to the eyes.

## Check list

- Have you been suffering from back pain for some time, which started before you were 45 years old?
- Does the back pain often occur during the night or early in the morning, and when you are resting?
- Do you have less pain when you move?
- Does your back feel stiff when you get up in the morning?
- Does the pain lessen when you are resting?

If you, friends or acquaintances answer four of these five questions with "yes", you should consult a rheumatologist.

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## Morbus Bechterew More than "just" back pain

Key facts summarised in a clear, understandable way



### Brief Overview



## Morbus Bechterew – Facts & Figures

### Greek name: Spondyl-arthr-itis

- Spondylos = spine
- Arthr = joint
- Itis = inflammation

### A large number of sufferers

- Around 400,000 persons in Germany
- Frequently between 20 and 40 years old
- Permanent back and joint pain

### Treatment should be carried out early

- Medication keeps inflammation under control
- Physical therapy keeps the body supple
- Stiffening can be prevented

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Information on medical issues has been summarised  
in a clear, understandable way. This information makes  
no claim to completeness.

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## Morbus Bechterew – an example

### Harry has had back pain for months

Harry, 30 years old, has been suffering from back pain and stiffness after getting up in the morning for some time now. He finds the pain annoying. After all, he's young and fit. When he exercises in the morning, the pain and stiffness lessen.

The pain usually disappears completely when he is at work. The pain worsens when he lies in bed. Harry doesn't know what to do. Should he consult a doctor? If so, which doctor should he go to?



## Prof. Dr. Denis Poddubnyy provides the following advice

“ The symptoms (starting between 20 and 45 years of age, improvement during exercise, no improvement when resting, morning stiffness) indicate that inflammation might be the cause of his back pain.

He should go to a specialist for rheumatology and be examined. If he is suffering from spondylarthritis or Morbus Bechterew, it's important that the disease is identified and treated at an early stage. By doing so, the disease can be better controlled, because the spine has not been so severely affected.

Morbus Bechterew is one of the most commonly occurring forms of rheumatism, and can affect young people too. ”



Prof. Dr. Denis Poddubnyy is the head of the rheumatology department at the Benjamin Franklin Campus at the Berlin Charité Hospital.

## Diagnosis and treatment take the following course

### Blood

90 per cent of all persons suffering from spondylarthritis have a certain gene, the so-called HLA-B27 feature. This is a strong indicator that the disease is present. This can be determined with a blood test.

### Images

An X-ray examination allows the effect of inflammation in the joints and spine to be identified. Magnetic resonance imaging is often used to make an early diagnosis, as it allows active inflammation to be identified during the first weeks and months of the disease.

### Medication

In many cases, patients must take medication regularly and for the long term, in order to alleviate inflammation and the pain caused by it. Different types of medication are available. Together with the patient, the doctor will assess which medication works well in the long term.

### Physical therapy

Patients must take part in physical therapy regularly and for the long term. Sport is particularly important, as it makes the body more supple, reducing pain.