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.

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: 018 04-600 000. 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 Disease (Deutsche Vereinigung Morbus Bechterew e. V.) at the telephone number: 097 21-220 33.

Internet
On the Internet at www.rheuma-liga.de and 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.

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 redder 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.

The disease can also involve the following:

Bowel

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Skin

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Eye

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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

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 Poddubny 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.

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.