



EAST ALABAMA RHEUMATOLOGY CENTER,  
A SERVICE OF EAST ALABAMA MEDICAL CENTER

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## PATIENT HANDBOOK

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## OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday 8:00am-5:00pm.

Phones open 8:00am-5:00pm

<https://earc.eamc.org/>

*Have questions?*

*Please call our office at 334-528-6610 or send us a message through the patient portal.*

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## SCHEDULING APPOINTMENTS

### New Patients

New patients interested in evaluation by a Rheumatologist should first be evaluated by their primary care physician to determine if they need this particular specialist's attention.

Many forms of arthritis are managed well by an Internist, Family Physician, Orthopedist, or Rehab Physician. Referral from your physician with supporting documents will help expedite scheduling your appointment.

If you are transferring from another rheumatologist, these records may be provided in lieu of another physician's referral and will be used to triage your appointment.

Our physicians see patients from 14 years of age and up.

The physician referring you to our office may fax a referral and your medical records for review to 334-528-6628.

### Return Patients

Patients are seen Monday through Friday in our office.

Every effort will be made to accommodate work-ins immediately but may take 1-2 weeks depending on the schedule. We will do our best to accommodate your schedule and address your concerns quickly.

If you are experiencing a reaction to medications, a new problem that has never been discussed with us, or a flare up of an old problem, you must make an appointment to be seen by one of our providers.

- **New Patients- New patient forms are under our "FORMS" tab on our home page. Your visit will be more efficient if you complete these ahead of time.**
  - **Please arrive 30 minutes early if you have not completed your forms ahead of your visit.**
- **Bring your valid picture ID, insurance and pharmacy cards, and your copay/deductible/prior balance to every visit.**
- **Bring your relevant imaging reports, labs, or previous medical records from other doctors.**
- **Bring a current copy of your medications or your bottles for review by the nurse.**

Patients must report any changes in demographics, such as changes in name, address, contact numbers, insurance, contact family members. You must report these changes to us as soon as they occur so that we can provide the best care possible.

**\*\*\* If you arrive more than 15 minutes after your appointment time, you will be rescheduled to the next available appointment time for your provider.**

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## NO SHOWS

We want to help you keep your appointments. Appointment reminder calls will be provided 1-2 days prior to your appointment, email and text messages are also utilized, and you receive a reminder of your next appointment at checkout. Even though we make every attempt to reach patients, it is the responsibility of the patient to records the date and time of their appointments.

We reserve the right to charge you for missed appointments without notice. If you do not show up for your appointment and do not call in advance, you may be charged up to \$50.00.

Please arrive on time for your appointment. If you are unable to make this appointment, please call at least 24 hours in advance to reschedule.

*Multiple missed visits are grounds for dismissal from the clinic.*

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## MEDICAL RECORDS/FORMS

We follow state guidelines for reproduction of medical records which allow us to charge \$1 per page.

Forms will be billed according to complexity. Form fees usually range from \$15-\$100. FMLA forms are \$25. Letters can be up to \$100. Some forms can take up to thirty days to be filled out, depending on their complexity.

Your medical records may be shared with any physician you indicate on the appropriate paperwork at your clinic visit, with any physician that has referred you to us, or with any

physician we refer you to free of charge. We are unable to share other physician's records with anyone else.

If you require copies of your medical records, we must receive your request in writing before we can release them.

Paper copies of your records will be charged at a standard fee per page as listed above.

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## FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Determine your specialist co-pay on your insurance plan ahead of time and be prepared to pay that amount at the time of your visit. If annual deductibles have not been met, please be prepared to pay applicable charges.

Payments can be in the form of cash, personal check or credit card. We accept Debit Cards, Visa, Mastercard, American Express and Discover.

We provide additional services in the office such as injections, ultrasounds and x-rays for your convenience.

**Based on your insurance plan, this may result in additional copays or coinsurance.**

If your insurance requires a referral to see any of our providers, it is your responsibility to get that referral to us before your visit.

If we do not have your referral two days before your appointment, we will have to reschedule you to another day.

Payment is expected at the time service is rendered. Your insurance company requires you to pay your co-pay at the time of service. The cost of billing services continues to raise with practice expenses. In order that we may keep our fees as low as possible, we are trying to eliminate billing after your visit.

**An account which is past due and for which no payment arrangements have been made, will be forwarded to a collection agency.**

If you have any questions, please contact our billing department at (334) 528- 7240.

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## **PATIENT PORTAL**

### **Want to send us a secure message or refill request?? Use our Patient portal!**

When you are registered for an appointment with our office, we will ask you for an email address. If you give us an email address, we will send out an invitation to our patient portal to the email address you indicated.

Once you accept the invite and set up a username and password, you will then be allowed to send secure messages to our staff and allow us to respond to you in a secure manner. Examples of what you can do on the patient portal are: asking for refills, asking the nurse a question about your condition or medications, or ask questions regarding lab work/imaging results to be sent to you via the portal.

To get back to the portal after accepting the initial invitation, go to [MyHealthRecord.com](http://MyHealthRecord.com) to sign in. You can also access it on our web page at <http://earc.eamc.org> and clicking on the Patient Portal button at the top right of the screen.

If you forget your username or your password after you have completed the initial set up, you can click on the links for forgot username or password. To ensure that the portal is pulling in the correct patient, you may be asked additional questions to include your zip code. This will have to match what is in our system for the portal to connect your information correctly. If you still have issues signing into the portal after trying these steps, please call our office at 334-528-6610 and press option 1 to connect to our front desk.

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## **MEDICATION PRIOR AUTHORIZATION AND ASSISTANCE**

If one of our providers start you on a medication that requires prior-authorization from your insurance, we will work with you and your insurance company to get the authorization needed. This is a courtesy that we like to provide our patients; however, we cannot control insurance companies.

Prior authorizations can take up to six months to get approved. We need you to work with us during this process by giving us adequate time to get the paperwork completed and submitted, as well as communicate all changes in insurance within five days of getting the new insurance.

We may have to call and request more info and that info must be provided for us to continue the prior authorization process.

If you need assistance in paying for your medications, you will be required to provide the information that we request in order for us to get the assistance set up.

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## PRESCRIPTIONS

All medications are sent electronically through the electronic health record to the preferred pharmacy indicated on your Patient Forms. If you require use of a mail order pharmacy, be sure to remind the nurse and physician of this preference so it will also be added to your local pharmacy. We make every effort to provide 90 day supplies to adherent patients for optimal convenience and compliance. Be sure all of your requested refills are sent before you leave your appointment to reduce any delay in your medications between visits.

### Refills

If you find you will not have enough medication to make it to your next appointment, you can have your pharmacy send us an electronic refill request, or you can go through the patient portal. If these methods have not worked, call our office and leave a message for the nurse. Please leave the message on the nurse line of the provider you saw last visit. Also, please confirm pharmacy information and a phone number where you can be reached should we have questions.

Refill requests will be handled daily but you should allow 3 days advance notice to account for office and pharmacy processing. If we are unable to honor your request, you will be notified by phone along with the reason your request has been denied. Common reasons refill requests will be denied include: 1) the medication is a controlled substance 2) you have either missed appointments or missed lab visits, 3) the medication is prescribed by another physician, or 4) there is a safety concern.

**Please do not call requesting new medications between visits or medications not reviewed by the physician at your previous appointments.**

Many medications require periodic clinical and laboratory monitoring. Patients must be seen at the physician's recommended intervals and at least yearly.

### Controlled Substances

Controlled substance medications, including all narcotics, follow unique prescribing guidelines. They must be dispensed for 30 days at a time and require strict adherence to pain agreements. As a general rule, we do not prescribe pain medications. There are a few exceptions based on the physician's evaluation.

There will be no refills in between visits, after hours, or after missed appointments. There will be no refills for excessive use, lost or stolen prescriptions, or acute pain or health changes in between your clinic visits.

You should obtain controlled substances and narcotics from a single provider. Obtaining controlled prescriptions from multiple providers is prohibited.

Your prescription must be provided at your regularly scheduled appointment.

Database screens are also conducted to ensure medications are filled correctly with your pharmacy and with a single provider. Be sure you bring controlled medication bottles and remaining pills to all of your appointments.

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## IMAGING

For your convenience, we offer some xrays and ultrasounds in the office when ordered by our providers. All xrays and ultrasounds performed in the office are read by either Dr. Adams or Dr. Ali.

Other imaging tests, such as MRI's or CT's, are ordered and performed outside of office; however, the results are sent back to our office. We report your imaging results by phone and are happy to share your results by fax, as well, for your personal records. Please indicate when we call if you need the results faxed.

Results of any other tests or imaging ordered by another physician will need to be relayed and explained by the ordering physician.

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## **LABS**

Labs are obtained at your clinic visits as well as a walk-in as ordered, but may be checked at either Quest or LabCorp in between visits, depending on patient insurance requirements. If labs are not drawn in our office, please let the office staff know where your labs were drawn, so we can follow up on them, or provide the office with a copy of your labs.

You may arrive for your lab draws between 8:30am-11am and 1pm to 4:30pm, Monday through Thursday and 8:30am to 11am on Fridays.

Lab results are generally discussed at the follow up appointments. Non-urgent lab discussions about complex rheumatologic lab results occur with the physician at your scheduled appointment. We provide brief phone call updates between visits for reassurance. If you would like to obtain a copy of your results by fax or need another physician to receive a copy, please remind us when we call or at your next visit.

Do not hesitate to call or utilize the patient portal with specific questions about your surveillance and safety lab checks.

If you are notified of abnormal lab work from another physician that may impact your rheumatologic management, please notify the nurse and Rheumatologist and have those results faxed for the physician's review.

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## **ADVOCACY**

**Does Your ARTHRITIS Frustrate You? Does Your Insurance Make You ANGRY?**

**Do You Want To Do Something ABOUT It?**

**BECOME AN ADVOCATE!**

Please help us to help you! Healthcare in our country has become a complicated puzzle of rules and exclusions that leaves many patients without treatment, and many doctors frustrated that they can't break the barriers to get patients care.

There are many organizations that benefit our patients and that promote advocacy, including the Arthritis Foundation (<http://www.arthritis.org/advocate/join-the-movement/>), and the American College of Rheumatology (<http://www.rheumatology.org>).

There is also the Simple Tasks Campaign, which is designed to promote awareness of arthritis-related issues and provide additional advocacy (<http://simpletasks.org>).

If you would like additional info about advocacy and more disease specific advocacy websites, please ask for more information at our front desk.

## CONTACT

### East Alabama Rheumatology Center

2000 Pepperell Pkwy, Building 5

Opelika, AL 36801

Phone (334) 528-6610

Fax (334) 528-6628

Website: <https://earc.eamc.org/>

Portal: [MyHealthRecord.com](http://MyHealthRecord.com)



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## PROVIDERS



**Christopher Adams, MD**

Dr. Adams is board-certified in both rheumatology and internal medicine. He earned his medical degree from the University of Alabama School of Medicine, and completed his internship

and residency at Wilford Hall USAF Medical Center. He has also completed a fellowship in clinical immunology and rheumatology from the University of Alabama School of Medicine.



**Zarmeena Ali, MD**

Dr. Ali is board certified in both rheumatology and internal medicine. She earned her medical degree from Aga Khan Medical College, and her residency was completed at the

University of Connecticut. She completed a fellowship in Rheumatology at Washington University in St. Louis, MO. Dr. Ali recently worked at the Cleveland Clinic in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Dr. Adams utilizes physician extenders to help care for his patients. If your initial consultation is done with Dr. Adams, your subsequent visits will alternate with either Dr. Adams, Joanna Szulga, PA-C or Molly Reeves, NP-C. Both extenders consult with Dr. Adams on their patients. Once you establish care with one of the physician extenders, you will alternate visits with Dr. Adams and that extender only.



**Joanna Szulga, PA-C**

Joanna graduated from Auburn University with a BS in Microbiology/Pre-Medicine and a BA in Spanish. She went on to Physician Assistant school at the Medical University of South

Carolina in Charleston, SC and graduated with her Masters of Science in Physician Assistant Studies.



**Molly Reeves, NP-C**

Molly Reeves is a board certified Family Nurse Practitioner. She obtained her Master of Science in Nursing from Auburn University and Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the

University of Alabama at Birmingham. She has worked in the field of rheumatology since 2011.





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**Thank you for selecting East Alabama Rheumatology Center, a service of East Alabama Medical Center.**

Please sign below acknowledging you have received a copy of our EARC patient handbook.

If you feel you cannot accept any of our policies listed in the patient handbook, please let us know and we will assist you in locating another Rheumatologist.

I acknowledge receipt of the EARC Patient handbook:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient/Guardian Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed