

# Diagnosing Sarcoma: A toolkit for GPs

*All patients with a suspected/diagnosed sarcoma should be referred to a Sarcoma Specialist Centre.*

## What is sarcoma?

Sarcomas are cancers that develop in the supporting or connective tissues of the body such as muscle, bone, nerves, cartilage, blood vessels and fat.

There are around 100 different subtypes of sarcoma, all of which can be grouped into two main types: **soft tissue sarcomas and bone sarcomas.**



## Clinical presentations

of soft tissue sarcoma

- Lump more than 5cm in size
- Lump increasing in size
- Deep to fascia, fixed or immobile
- Lump that is rapidly changing



## Clinical presentations

of bone sarcoma

Unexplained bone pain or tenderness, which is:

- persistent
- increasing
- non-mechanical
- nocturnal or at rest



## Investigations

for soft tissue sarcoma

- Refer for urgent ultrasound
- Refer for urgent appointment to a sarcoma specialist centre if scan suggests soft tissue sarcoma, or if findings are uncertain



## Investigations

for bone sarcoma

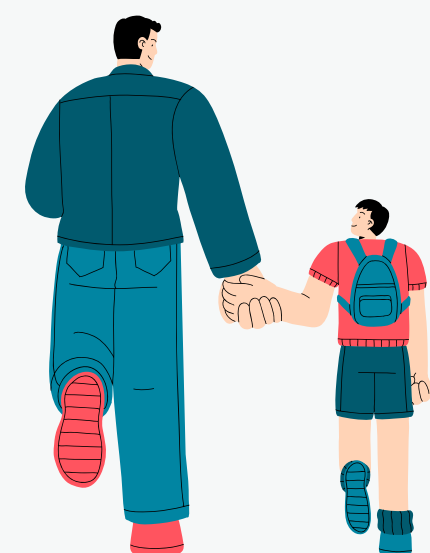
- Refer for urgent x-ray
- Refer for urgent appointment to a sarcoma specialist centre if an x-ray suggests bone sarcoma, or if findings are uncertain



## Regional and age-related variations

- Timelines on referral pathways vary between adult and children
- Referral guidelines vary between England/Wales/Northern Ireland and Scotland

*You can read more about these variations on the following page.*



# Diagnosing Sarcoma: Regional variations

## England, Wales & Northern Ireland

## Scotland

### Clinical presentations

of soft tissue sarcoma

- Lump more than 5cm in size
- Lump increasing in size
- Deep to fascia, fixed or immobile
- Lump that is rapidly changing

### Clinical presentations

of soft tissue sarcoma

- Lump more than 5cm in size
- Lump increasing in size
- Deep to fascia, fixed or immobile
- Recurrence after previous excision
- Regional lymph node enlargement
- Lump that is rapidly changing

### Investigations

for soft tissue sarcoma

- Refer for urgent ultrasound (performed within 2 weeks for adults, or 48 hours for children)
- Refer via suspected sarcoma Two Week Rule (TWR) pathway (or within 48 hours for children) to a sarcoma specialist centre if scan suggests soft tissue sarcoma, or if findings are uncertain and clinical concern remains

### Investigations

for soft tissue sarcoma

- Refer urgently to a sarcoma specialist centre for investigation
- Refer urgently to a sarcoma specialist centre for investigation

### Clinical presentations

of bone sarcoma

- Unexplained bone pain or tenderness, which is:
  - persistent
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### Clinical presentations

of bone sarcoma

- Unexplained bone pain or tenderness, which is:
  - persistent
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### Investigations

for bone sarcoma

- Refer for urgent x-ray (performed within 2 weeks)
- Refer via suspected sarcoma Two Week Rule (TWR) pathway (or within 48 hours for children) to a bone sarcoma specialist centre if an x-ray suggests bone sarcoma, or if findings are uncertain and clinical concern remains

### Investigations

for bone sarcoma

- Refer for urgent x-ray
- Refer for urgent appointment to a sarcoma specialist centre if an x-ray suggests bone sarcoma, or if findings are uncertain and clinical concern remains

## Further reading

NICE recommendations for suspected sarcoma: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng12/chapter/Recommendations-organised-by-site-of-cancer#sarcomas>

British Sarcoma Group guidelines:

- For soft tissue sarcomas: <https://clinicalsarcomaresearch.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13569-016-0060-4>
- For bone sarcomas: <https://clinicalsarcomaresearch.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13569-016-0047-1>
- For GIST: <https://clinicalsarcomaresearch.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13569-017-0072-8>

Free GatewayC module: <https://sarcoma.org.uk/healthcare-professionals-hub/sarcoma-early-diagnosis-a-new-course-from-gatewayc/>



**SarcomaUK**  
The bone & soft tissue  
cancer charity