

Patient information

Treating Psoriasis with Biologics and Additional Immunosuppression

Dermatology Department

This leaflet discusses Biological treatment with the addition of Immunosuppressive medication.

What is Biological Treatment?

A biological treatment is a drug used to suppress the immune system to help the body fight a disease.

Why am I prescribed additional immunosuppression with my biological treatment?

If you are on biological treatment for your psoriasis and your psoriasis starts to re-appear leading to less effective disease control an additional immunosuppressive tablet could be added to help achieve better control of your psoriasis.

How does it work?

Biological treatment for psoriasis switches parts of the immune system off including the parts leading to psoriasis. The immune system over a period of time might learn how to partially overcome the biological treatment leading to loss of control and re-appearance of psoriasis.

Adding an immunosuppressant tablet to your biological treatment will limit your immune system's ability to overcome your biological treatment and might help switch off the parts that are producing psoriasis.

How should I take it?

The additional immunosuppressant would be generally in a tablet form. The majority are tablets that are used for the treatment of psoriasis you might have had before your biological treatment e.g. Methotrexate, Hydroxycarbamide, Azathioprine, Mycophenolate Mofetil, Fumaderm, and Ciclosporin.

The decision to use one of the above will depend on previous use of the tablet and any other medical problems that you might already have. You will receive a separate information leaflet about the exact tablet that is going to be used in your case.

What are the benefits of adding an immunosuppressant tablet to my biologic?

There are potentially two benefits:

- Tighter control of psoriasis is sometimes possible with achieving better skin clearance.
- From studies conducted on large groups of patients it has been found that any biological treatment has the ability to control psoriasis for a limited period of time. This approach might increase the amount of time that your biological treatment is able to control your psoriasis.

Are there any side effects?

All medicines have side effects but not everyone will experience them.

There are specific side effects that each individual tablet has and that would be covered by the information leaflet that you will receive once a choice of tablet is made.

Combining biological therapy with an oral immunosuppressant tablet will produce a state of additional immunosuppression that leads to two main concerns:

1. Severe infections:

Biological therapies and oral immunosuppressant tablets on their own lower the immune system and put you at a higher risk of infections. Combining those two together could potentially lead to added lowering of the immune system and higher risks of infection.

2. Increased risk of cancerous or pre-cancerous events:

Any suppression in your immune system carries a risk of these events. The risk is dependent on the treatment itself. Combining both biological and oral immunosuppressants can lead to increasing this risk especially in skin cancer and lymphoma.

Your risk of infection is sometimes increased

Contact your doctor or the Department of Dermatology immediately if you develop an infection, severe sore throat, fever, mouth ulcers, and unexplained bruising or have been in contact with chickenpox or shingles.

Managing the increased risk of infection and cancerous changes

We advise patients on this combination to engage with national programs for seasonal flu and pneumonia vaccination.

We also advise patients to be up to date with national cancer surveillance programs e.g. cervical, breast, colon and prostate.

We also recommend stopping smoking and the use of high protective sun barrier creams (SPF50).

Can I take other medications?

Always tell your doctor about any medicines you are taking, or have recently taken, including those obtained without a prescription.

Individual interactions will be listed in detail in the specific biologic and oral immunosuppressant patient information leaflets you should have received in clinic.

Are there any alternatives available?

There are other treatments available for your skin and these will be discussed by the doctor at your consultation. Phototherapy (light treatment) may also be available but only for certain conditions.

What will happen if I decide not to have the treatment?

The balance between how much psoriasis is there on your skin versus the risks of additional treatment is a difficult and individual decision. While some patients are happy with some disease activity but less risk others might want complete disease control and accept that this comes with potential additional side effect.

If an alternate biological treatment is available then you might be offered one.

Is there anything else I need to know?

- You should avoid immunisation injections, which involve any live vaccines such as Polio or German measles (rubella).
- If you come into contact with someone who has chickenpox or shingles and you have not had chicken pox, tell your doctor **immediately**.
- Take all medicines as your doctor told you; these instructions are on the label container.
- In female patients if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or if you are breast-feeding you should make sure you discuss this with your doctor as soon as possible before receiving additional oral immunosuppression.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

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