Gastroenterology Directorate

PATIENT INFORMATION

Drugs For Crohn’s Disease – Adalimumab

If your Crohn’s disease has not been well controlled and you have not responded to other medications, or perhaps are no longer getting a good response to infliximab infusions, your doctors may decide to give you a drug called Adalimumab.

What is Adalimumab?

Adalimumab is a new treatment for Crohn’s disease. There have been studies that show that Adalimumab appears to benefit patients with Crohn’s disease who have lost their response to or cannot tolerate Infliximab. Although it is not yet licensed for use in Crohn’s disease, it is licensed in the UK for use in rheumatoid arthritis in which condition it has proved very effective.

What are the benefits of having Adalimumab?

Adalimumab is a drug that controls inflammation, which then reduces your symptoms, like infliximab (Remicaide).

What are the risks and side effects of Adalimumab?

Side effects are uncommon and usually mild. Side effects include a runny nose, nausea, diarrhoea, rash, and discomfort at the injection site.

Rarely, patients may have an allergic reaction. If this happens injections would be stopped.

If you are unwell on the day of your injection, such as suffering from a cold or have a high temperature, you must tell the nurse. This is important, as it may be necessary to delay the injection until you are feeling better.

Are there any alternative treatments available?

The only alternative is to continue with your usual medication.
What will happen if I decide not to have treatment?

Unfortunately, your symptoms would continue.

How is Adalimumab given?

Adalimumab is given as a subcutaneous injection (under the skin but not into a vein or muscle), every two weeks. We will show you how to give this yourself.

What dose of Adalimumab will I receive?

80 milligrams (mgs) is given at the first injection followed by 40mgs every two weeks.

How long will it take to work?

The response to treatment varies. Available information suggests that the clinical response is usually achieved within 12 weeks of treatment. Continued therapy may be reconsidered if there is no response within this time period.

How often will I have Adalimumab?

This will be decided according to your response to treatment by the doctor looking after you, and will depend upon your general well-being, symptoms and blood results.

Do I need to come in to hospital for my Adalimumab injection?

At first you will need to come to the hospital as a day case for your first injection and for instruction from your specialist nurse who will teach you how to give your own future injections. Once you and the specialist nurse are happy that you are able to give the injection, you will be able to give it yourself at home.

Do I need any tests before my Adalimumab injection?

Yes, you will need a chest x-ray (if you have not had a chest x-ray in the last three months). This is to ensure that you do not have Tuberculosis (TB), as Adalimumab can in some cases reactivate old Tuberculosis.

Do I continue my other medication for Crohn’s disease?

Yes, all the medications used to treat Crohn’s disease can be used together with Adalimumab apart from other antibody treatments such as Infliximab. Most patients also take Azathioprine or Methotrexate (immunosuppressant drugs). These not only help to keep your Crohn’s disease suppressed but also help to prevent your own immune system from reacting against Adalimumab.
Your specialist nurse will discuss your medications with you when you come for your injection.

**Do I need any special checks following Adalimumab?**

Not if you feel well. Adalimumab and the combination of other medications you may be taking can lower your resistance to infection. You should inform your GP or IBD specialist nurse if you develop a persistent sore throat, fever or any other infection. Because Adalimumab is a new treatment for Crohn's disease, you need to carry an ALERT card with you stating you are receiving Adalimumab injections.

**Can I have immunizations after having Adalimumab?**

Flu vaccinations are safe following Adalimumab injections, but you should avoid immunizations with live vaccines such as polio and rubella. If you need any vaccinations, let your doctor know when you last had Adalimumab.

**Can I drink alcohol after having Adalimumab?**

There is no reason to avoid alcohol (in moderation) after having Adalimumab.

**Does Adalimumab affect fertility and pregnancy?**

The effect of Adalimumab on fertility and unborn babies is unknown. Therefore we strongly recommended that women should not become pregnant for at least six months after treatment has been discontinued. Men should not try for a baby with their partners for six months after their last injection of Adalimumab.

Adalimumab should not be given to women if they are pregnant or breastfeeding. Women must not breastfeed for at least five months after their last Adalimumab injection.

**Who cannot receive Adalimumab?**

- Patients under 16 years of age.
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women.
- Patients with moderate to severe congestive heart failure (CHF – a condition in which the heart is unable to pump enough blood to maintain normal physical activity).
- Patients with active Tuberculosis or other severe infections.

**Can I have surgery if I am taking Adalimumab?**

There is limited experience of patients having surgery while taking Adalimumab. A patient needing surgery while taking Adalimumab would be closely monitored for infections, and appropriate actions would be taken.
Where can I get further information about Adalimumab?

If you have any questions about Adalimumab, ask your doctor, your IBD specialist nurse or your pharmacist.

Further Information:

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