

## **What you need to know about Infliximab (Remicade) in the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease**

### **What is my medicine?**

Infliximab has the trade name Remicade and is also sometimes known as anti-TNF (Tumour Necrosis Factor-alpha).

Infliximab is used for people with active Crohn's disease who have tried standard treatments (such as mesalazine, prednisolone and azathioprine) and continue to have severe symptoms, or who have developed fistulae (a passage between loops of bowel and the skin or other organs such as the bladder).

### **How does it work?**

Infliximab interrupts the inflammatory process that occurs in Crohn's disease by blocking a protein called tumour necrosis factor-alpha which is thought to be increased in patients with active disease. This allows healing of the lining of the bowel and closure of fistulas in most cases.

### **How is infliximab given?**

Infliximab is given by intravenous infusion over two hours through a drip in your arm. Your pulse and blood pressure will be recorded every thirty minutes during the infusion and for two hours afterwards. Normally you will be able to go home after this.

You will be given three separate infusions over six weeks but you may need to have further treatments with infliximab every eight weeks, depending how your disease responds to the treatment.

### **Can I take other medicines?**

Infliximab can be taken with most other medication, except a drug used in rheumatoid arthritis called Anakinra. You must not have live vaccines whilst taking infliximab - if you need any vaccinations please check with the doctor that is treating you first.

To be safe, it is important to tell your doctor or nurse specialist of any medication you are currently taking, including those bought over-the-counter.

### **Will I need to have any tests before having the infusion?**

Before having the infusion you will need to have a number of blood tests. This is to ensure that your liver is functioning well and also to check your blood count and inflammatory markers. You will also be asked to have a chest x-ray and special blood test to check for tuberculosis. Your doctor may advise other tests before starting the treatment.

If you have a fistula you may need to have a scan to detect any abscesses or collections, as these will need to be treated before you can start your treatment.

### **What side effects does the treatment have?**

The common side effects (1 in 100) of treatment with infliximab include:

- Headache
- Joint pains
- Dry skin / rash
- Abdominal pain
- Infections of the chest / throat/ urinary tract
- Increased sweating
- Nausea

Some people can have an allergic reaction to infliximab, although this is uncommon (about 1 in 1000). If an allergic reaction does happen it can cause shortness of breath, raised pulse or

blood pressure. To deal with this, we will either slow down the infusion or stop it altogether. To help reduce the chance of your having a reaction to infliximab we will give you a steroid (hydrocortisone) intravenously just before you have the infusion.

People treated with infliximab can also develop a condition called 'drug-induced lupus'. This is very rare, and is usually mild. Symptoms include fever, rash and joint pains. If you develop drug-induced lupus, infliximab will be stopped after which the problem normally disappears.

Some people have developed serious and life-threatening infections after treatment with infliximab. If you develop any symptoms of infection such as raised temperature or flu-like symptoms you should tell your doctor straight away.

**You must not have any active infection at the time of treatment with infliximab. It is therefore essential that you inform the doctor or nurse specialist of any sore throat, cold, recent chest or urinary infection, abscess or other infection before the treatment date.**

There is some evidence to suggest that people who are treated with immunosuppressant drugs may be more prone to developing a type of cancer called lymphoma which affects the lymph glands. There have been a few reported cases in patients with Crohn's disease treated with this agent but the overall risk remains very small.

It is important to remember that Infliximab is a relatively new drug, therefore the long term safety and possible side effects are not fully known.

**Can I drink alcohol while taking infliximab?**

Yes, it is safe to drink alcohol with this medicine.

**Will it have an effect on fertility or pregnancy?**

No-one knows the risk of infliximab to the unborn baby. Women of child-bearing age must use contraception whilst on the drug and for at least 6 months after the last treatment. Women should not breast feed while on infliximab.

**What if I have any other questions?**

If you have any further questions about your treatment please contact the inflammatory bowel disease specialist nurses during office hours:

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