

Patient information

Drugs for Inflammatory Bowel Disease Ciclosporin

Digestive Diseases Care Group

Why have I been given ciclosporin?

Ciclosporin is used in some patients with ulcerative colitis who have not responded to or not tolerated other treatments. It is often given as a drip straight into the vein (intravenously) in patients who have been admitted to hospital with severe ulcerative colitis. It can be continued when patients go home as a tablet that is swallowed. Some patients only receive the tablet form of this drug and do not have a drip.

What is ciclosporin?

Ciclosporin is used widely in patients who have had organ transplants to prevent the body rejecting the transplant. It is also useful in other conditions which are caused by the body's reaction to its own tissues. For this reason, ciclosporin can be useful in the treatment of ulcerative colitis.

What are the benefits of taking ciclosporin?

In patients with severe colitis who have been admitted to hospital (and may be facing the possibility of surgery) ciclosporin may be another treatment option. However, it is important to know that up to half of patients with severe colitis that do not respond to treatment with steroids will also fail to respond to ciclosporin. In these cases, the only treatment may be to have an operation to remove the inflamed colon (colectomy).

How long will it take to work?

Ciclosporin works quickly, usually within a week. Ciclosporin is often given for a period of three months. You may be prescribed another drug called azathioprine before leaving hospital. Azathioprine works in a similar way to ciclosporin but is less potent and due to the lower risk of side effects from it, it may maintain your remission from your colitis better in the long term. However, it can take up to two months before the azathioprine starts to work, which is why it is not used to treat people with severe colitis who need quicker results.

What are the common side effects?

The most common side effects (occurring in more than one in ten patients) include nausea, diarrhoea or heartburn. These may improve on a lower dose of the drug. Some patients may experience headaches or muscular aches and pains. Ciclosporin can affect the kidneys. If blood tests show abnormal kidney function tests you may have to stop the drug temporarily. In most cases the kidney function returns to normal.

A small number of patients experience tremor. This resolves if the drug is stopped or if the dose is lowered.

Other side effects can include high blood pressure, high blood sugars, and difficulty getting to sleep, seizures and gout (sudden onset of joint swelling and pain).

Ciclosporin can increase the risk of developing infections. If you develop a sore throat, fever, bruising, or begin to feel generally unwell contact your hospital IBD doctor or IBD specialist nurse.

If you come into contact with someone with chicken pox or shingles, you should see your family doctor (GP) immediately and contact your IBD specialist nurse as you may need to attend hospital for a blood test and to start treatment.

Are there alternative treatments available?

If you develop side effects with ciclosporin, or your disease is not well-controlled your hospital IBD doctor will discuss other possible treatment options with you. However, if ciclosporin fails to control the activity of your colitis, you may need an operation to remove the inflamed colon.

What will happen if I decide not to have treatment with ciclosporin?

Your symptoms will continue or worsen unless you have an alternative treatment.

What dose should I take?

Ciclosporin is given as capsules and should usually be taken twice a day (morning and evening). You should take the ciclosporin at roughly the same time each day. The initial dose of ciclosporin is based on your weight. The dose will be adjusted according to the levels of the drug measured in your blood when you attend for regular blood tests.

The tablets should be swallowed with a glass of water on an empty stomach (one hour before food, or three hours after food). Grapefruit or grapefruit juice should be avoided whilst taking ciclosporin.

There are different brands of ciclosporin. It is important that you do not switch brands during treatment unless your hospital IBD doctor or specialist nurse has specifically discussed this with you. Your prescription will always specify which brand of ciclosporin you should receive.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

Take it as soon as you remember. If it is nearly time for the next dose, do not take the one you missed. Take the next dose at the usual time. Do not double the next dose.

Do I continue other treatments for inflammatory bowel disease?

Yes

Do I need any special checks whilst on ciclosporin?

Regular blood tests will be taken to check that there is the correct level of ciclosporin in your blood, and that your blood counts, kidney function and liver tests are normal.

You will have blood tests every week for the first four weeks, twice a month for two months and then once a month once you are on a stable dose of ciclosporin.

You will have your blood pressure checked each time you attend clinic.

Once a year you will have a blood test to check the amount of cholesterol in your blood

Can I take other medicines along with ciclosporin?

A number of medicines can interact with ciclosporin. Tell your doctor or pharmacist about all the medicines you take. This includes any medicines you have been prescribed by another doctor as well as medicines bought from a pharmacy or supermarket and any herbal remedies.

Does ciclosporin affect fertility and pregnancy?

There is not much information available about the use of ciclosporin in pregnancy in patients with inflammatory bowel disease. Most information about using ciclosporin in women who are pregnant comes from patients who have had an organ transplant. Ciclosporin is probably safe to use in pregnancy.

You should discuss your treatment with the IBD team if you are planning to become pregnant, or if you discover that you are pregnant.

Can I breastfeed while taking ciclosporin?

Ciclosporin is excreted in breast milk and should not be used in mothers who are breast feeding.

Can I drink alcohol on ciclosporin?

Yes, it is safe to drink alcohol while you are taking ciclosporin, however, large quantities of alcohol should be avoided.

Can I have vaccinations while on ciclosporin?

Flu vaccinations are safe on ciclosporin. You should have annual flu vaccinations while on this drug. You may also be offered other vaccinations before starting treatment. You should avoid immunisations with 'live' vaccines such as polio, BCG (Tuberculosis), MMR (measles, mumps and rubella). An 'inactive' polio vaccine can be given instead of a 'live' one. Close relatives may have 'live' vaccines without any risk to you.

Where can I obtain further information about ciclosporin?

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

This leaflet is not a substitute for any advice that your hospital IBD doctor, nurse or pharmacist may give you.

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

Inflammatory Bowel Specialist Nurses

Tel: 0151 706 2659

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2659

Email: IBDnurses@rlbuht.nhs.uk

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Review date: April 2023

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