

Patient information

Drugs for Inflammatory Bowel Disease Tacrolimus

Digestive Diseases Care Group

Why have I been given tacrolimus?

Tacrolimus is used in some patients with inflammatory bowel disease who have not responded to or have not tolerated other treatments.

What is tacrolimus?

Tacrolimus 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, tacrolimus can be useful in the treatment of ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.

Tacrolimus is taken as capsules by mouth. It is also available as an ointment and can be used for Crohn's disease when it involves the skin around the back passage.

How long will it take to work?

Tacrolimus works quickly, usually in two to four weeks.

What are the benefits of taking tacrolimus?

Tacrolimus can be effective in controlling inflammatory bowel disease and preventing you from having recurrent flares of symptoms.

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. Tacrolimus 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.

Tacrolimus can increase the risk of developing infections. If you develop a sore throat, fever, bruising, or begin to feel generally unwell contact your family doctor (GP,) hospital 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 tacrolimus, or your disease is not well-controlled your hospital doctor will discuss other possible treatment options with you.

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

Your symptoms will continue or worsen. Your hospital doctor will discuss other options for treatment with you.

What dose should I take?

Tacrolimus is given as capsules and should usually be taken twice a day (morning and evening). You should take the tacrolimus at roughly the same time each day. The initial dose of tacrolimus 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 capsules 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 tacrolimus.

You should always receive the same brand of tacrolimus (Prograf[®]) because the amount of tacrolimus absorbed into the bloodstream may vary between different brands made by different manufacturers. Always check you have been given the Prograf[®] brand of tacrolimus.

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 tacrolimus?

Regular blood tests will be taken to check that there is the correct level of tacrolimus 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 tacrolimus.

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 tacrolimus?

A number of medicines can interact with tacrolimus. Tell your family doctor (GP), hospital 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 tacrolimus affect fertility and pregnancy?

There is not much information available about the use of tacrolimus in pregnancy in patients with inflammatory bowel disease. Most information about using tacrolimus in women who are pregnant comes from patients who have had an organ transplant. Tacrolimus is probably safe to use in pregnancy. Delivering a baby earlier than the expected date is more common in women taking tacrolimus.

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 tacrolimus?

Tacrolimus is excreted in breast milk and breastfeeding should be avoided.

Can I drink alcohol on tacrolimus?

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

Can I have vaccinations while on tacrolimus?

Flu vaccinations are safe on tacrolimus. 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 tacrolimus?

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

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

Further Information

Inflammatory Bowel Specialist Nurses

Tel: 0151 706 2659

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2659

Email: IBDnurses@rlbuht.nhs.uk

Website: crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/mersey

All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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