

## Patient information

# Drugs for Inflammatory Bowel Disease Aminosalicylates (5-ASA)

## Digestive Diseases Care Group

If you have been diagnosed with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (Crohn's disease or Ulcerative Colitis) you may be prescribed an aminosalicylate sometimes called 5-ASA or mesalazine, which is a drug to help keep your disease under control.

### **What are 5-ASAs (Aminosalicylates)?**

They are a group of drugs that work by reducing the degree of active inflammation in the intestine, therefore giving the damaged intestinal lining time to heal.

There are several slightly different drugs in this group with different names and all are designed to treat different areas of the intestine. Your doctor will start you on the one that will give you the most benefit. It is important that you stick to the same unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

### **How are 5-ASAs given?**

These drugs can be given by mouth (tablets, capsules and granules) or through the anus by inserting an enema or suppository.

### **What dose of 5-ASAs will I be given?**

The dose will be decided by your doctor, and usually depends on how active the disease is and may be increased or decreased accordingly.

You will usually remain on a dose to help keep your disease under control, this is known as a maintenance dose.

### **What are the benefits of being on 5-ASAs?**

In ulcerative colitis, 5-ASAs are useful to treat a flare of the disease. Patients on 5-ASAs are advised to take them long-term for two reasons:

1. To keep the disease under control and reduce the risk of flare-ups.
2. To reduce the risk of bowel cancer.

The risk of bowel cancer in inflammatory bowel disease is slightly increased but studies have shown that this risk may be reduced by long-term use of 5-ASAs.

## **What will happen if I decide not to have treatment with 5-ASAs?**

In ulcerative colitis, if you do not take 5-ASAs there is a risk that you will have uncontrolled disease or recurrent flares of disease.

Your risk of colorectal cancer may be slightly higher if you do not take long-term 5-ASAs.

If you have Crohn's disease, stopping 5-ASAs will have little or no effect on the activity of your disease.

## **How long will it take to work?**

5-ASAs usually start to have an effect in two to three weeks.

## **Do 5-ASAs have any side effects?**

All medicines have some side effects associated with their use, however most patients experience none.

Side effects of 5-ASAs are usually mild and include, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, headaches, and rashes. However, rarely they can cause blood or kidney disorder, so it is important to have regular blood checks – these should be done at least once per year but usually sooner (e.g. three months) if you have recently started on the drug.

Rarely, some patients can be allergic or particularly sensitive to 5-ASAs and so it is important to report any unexplained bleeding, bruising, skin rash, long-lasting sore throat or fever. If this happens, sometimes the drug has to be stopped or changed.

## **Are there any alternative treatments to 5-ASAs?**

There are no similar drugs to 5-ASAs for the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease. If you are unable to take 5-ASAs by mouth (for example, if you get side effects), you may not need any other medication if you are well.

If you are prescribed a rectal 5-ASA (e.g. 5-ASA as an enema or suppository), a steroid enema or suppository could be used as an alternative. However, rectal 5-ASAs tend to be more effective.

## **Can I have immunisations whilst taking 5-ASAs?**

It is safe to have vaccinations whilst on 5-ASAs.

## **Can I drink alcohol whilst taking 5-ASAs?**

There is no reason to avoid alcohol (in moderation as per national guidelines) whilst taking 5-ASAs.

## **Do 5-ASAs affect fertility or pregnancy?**

There is one drug called salazopyrin (sulphasalazine) that is associated with a risk of reversible male infertility. Salazopyrin is not often used nowadays as the newer drugs tend to have fewer side effects.

Other 5-ASAs do not affect fertility and all can be safely taken in pregnancy.

## Where can I obtain further information about 5-ASAs?

If you have any questions about 5-ASAs, ask your doctor, your inflammatory bowel specialist nurse or your pharmacist.

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## Further Information

### Inflammatory Bowel Specialist Nurses

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Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2659

Email: [IBDnurses@rlbuht.nhs.uk](mailto:IBDnurses@rlbuht.nhs.uk)

Website: [crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/mersey](http://crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/mersey)

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