

# Treating inflammatory bowel disease

Ciclosporin



**Information for patients**

Gastroenterology



**PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



This leaflet should not replace the information provided by the drug manufacturer. Please ensure that you read the manufacturer's information leaflet as well.

## **What is ciclosporin and what does it do?**

Ciclosporin (Deximune or Neoral) belongs to a group of drugs known as immunosuppressants. They work by dampening down the body's immune system. This reduces the inflammation which causes the symptoms of ulcerative colitis.

Ciclosporin is used in patients with a severe flare-up of colitis which has not responded to intravenous (into a vein) steroid treatment. 50% to 80% of patients will have an initial response to ciclosporin and avoid an operation. However, studies show that half of these will relapse and need to have an operation at a later time.

## **How and when should I take ciclosporin?**

Ciclosporin is given intravenously by a pump which runs continually for up to 5 to 7 days.

If you respond to treatment you will be changed to ciclosporin tablets, which are taken twice a day.

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

Ciclosporin should start to work within about 3 to 5 days.

## **What will happen if I don't take this medication?**

If you don't want to take it, we may suggest an alternative drug treatment if this is appropriate, or we may continue with steroids for a few more days. If your symptoms don't improve we would normally advise an operation to remove the large bowel.

## **How long will I need to take ciclosporin for?**

After you leave hospital you will be prescribed a drug called azathioprine. This works in a similar way to ciclosporin but has fewer side effects.

Azathioprine takes at least 6 weeks to take effect (this is why we use ciclosporin at first as it is much faster acting). Once you have been taking azathioprine for 8 weeks, the ciclosporin dose will be stopped.

## **Are there any side effects or risks?**

Ciclosporin can cause unwanted side effects. It is important that you tell us straight away if you notice any side effects, as we may need to stop ciclosporin or reduce the dose.

The most common side effects include:

- Kidney problems
- High blood pressure
- Headaches
- Tremors

Common side effects include:

- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea
- Tingling, shaking or burning sensation in hands and feet
- Tiredness
- Increased hair growth
- Swollen gums

If you develop a sore throat, any infection or feel generally unwell, stop taking ciclosporin straight away and contact your doctor or nurse.

Tell us if you come into contact with anyone who has chickenpox or shingles and are unsure if you are immune.

The risk of developing some types of cancers, notably skin cancer and lymphoma, is increased in patients whose immune system is suppressed over a long period of time.

We would advise patients taking immunosuppression treatment to avoid too much sun, use sunscreen and avoid the use of sun beds.

## **Is there anything I should avoid or take alongside ciclosporin?**

Because ciclosporin affects the immune system, patients are at increased risk of developing a type of chest infection. To help prevent this we will give you an antibiotic called Co-trimoxazole (Septrin) while you are taking ciclosporin.

It is important that you do not have any live vaccines whilst taking ciclosporin. Your GP or practice nurse should be able to advise you about suitable vaccines.

We would recommend that you attend your GP practice for a seasonal flu jab, pneumococcal vaccination, and that women attend for their routine cervical screening (smear) tests.

Avoid drinking grapefruit as this can increase levels of ciclosporin in the blood.

## **Do I need to tell you about other medication I am taking?**

A number of drugs can react with ciclosporin. It is important that you tell us about all the medications you are taking, including those you buy from a chemist, shop or supermarket, before starting the treatment.

If you start any new medication, check with your doctor and pharmacist that it is safe to take with ciclosporin.

## **Will I need any tests while taking ciclosporin?**

You will need to have regular blood tests to monitor the level of ciclosporin in your blood, check your liver and kidney function, and monitor your blood pressure.

After you leave hospital you will be seen in clinic and have blood tests:

- weekly for 2 weeks
- monthly thereafter

**Do not** take ciclosporin until after your blood test as this will affect the result.

## **What should I do if I take more medication than I should?**

Do not take any further doses and contact your doctor or nurse specialist straight away.

## **What should I do if I forget a dose?**

Do not take a double dose to make up for a forgotten dose. Start taking the tablets when the next dose is due.

## **How do I store this medicine?**

Ciclosporin should be stored out of the reach and sight of children.

## **Can I drink alcohol?**

It is safe to drink alcohol in moderation whilst on ciclosporin.

## **What if my partner and I want to start a family?**

Although there is no evidence that ciclosporin can cause harm to an unborn baby, we would advise that you put any plans for a family on hold while you are on this treatment. Ciclosporin is used to treat severe active colitis and we would not advise women to plan a pregnancy when their disease is active.

Women taking any of these drugs should discuss breast feeding with their specialist. Small amounts of the drug, or its break down products, may pass into the breast milk.

## **How do I get a repeat prescription?**

Ciclosporin is normally prescribed by the hospital. Contact your nurse specialist when you need a repeat prescription.

## **Who do I contact if things get worse?**

Contact your IBD nurse or GP.

## Where can I find more information?

If you would like any more information about these treatments, please talk to your pharmacist, doctor or IBD nurse specialist.

The inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) nurse specialists can be contacted on:

- **0114 271 2209**  
Monday to Friday, 9.00am - 11.00am
- **sth.ibdnurse@nhs.net** (for repeat prescription requests)

## Further information is available from the following websites:

- **[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)**
- **[www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/about-inflammatory-bowel-disease](http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/about-inflammatory-bowel-disease)**



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