

# Treating inflammatory bowel disease – 5 ASAs

(Mesalazine, Sulfasalazine, Olsalazine, Balsalazide)



## Information for patients

Gastroenterology





## **What is my medicine?**

5 ASA drugs are used long-term in the treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) to control the symptoms of mild to moderate flare up, and to maintain remission. The drugs commonly used in both Crohn's and ulcerative colitis are called 5-amino salicylic acids (5 ASA's). They include drugs such as mesalazine (Asacol, Pentasa, Salofalk and Mezavant XL), olsalazine (Dipentum), balsalazide (Colazide), and sulphasalazine (Salazopyrin) and Mesalazine preparations are the ones most commonly prescribed.

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

Mesalazine is thought to reduce the risk of "flare ups" so it is very important that you continue to take your medication as prescribed, even when you feel well.

You should not stop taking your drugs without first discussing it with your gastroenterology doctor or specialist nurse.

## **How do 5 ASA's work?**

During a "flare up" of IBD, the bowel wall becomes inflamed, 5 ASA drugs have an anti inflammatory action that suppresses this inflammation.

During "flare ups" of your symptoms, the doctor/specialist nurse will try to reduce the inflammation by increasing the dose 5 ASA or, in some cases, adding other medication to work alongside them. This could take the form of tablets, enemas or suppositories depending on the extent and severity of your disease.

## **Is there anything that should stop me taking 5 ASA drugs?**

If you are allergic to aspirin, it is important that you mention it to the doctor before starting any of the 5 ASA drugs. This is because these drugs contain one of the active components that are also in aspirin.

## **What if I am pregnant or planning a family?**

Women planning to become pregnant should discuss their treatment options with the doctor and nurse specialist in clinic. It is generally advised that you continue to take your maintenance treatment throughout pregnancy, as an uncontrolled flare up of your disease can be more harmful to the baby, than the 5 ASA drugs.

Men taking Sulfasalazine may have a reduced sperm count, so, if you are planning to start a family, discuss your medication with your doctor or specialist nurse.

## **What monitoring will I need to have?**

You will be reviewed regularly in the Inflammatory Bowel Disease Clinic to assess your response to the treatment, as well as to assess the activity of your disease. You will also have to have periodic blood tests.

## **Can I take other medication?**

It is likely you will need to take other medications for your IBD, in addition to the maintenance treatment. Before taking any new medication, it is important that you tell the doctor/specialist nurse of all medications that you are already taking including over-the-counter treatments and complimentary or alternative medicine.

## What potential side effects are there?

All drugs can have side effects, although most patients do not notice any.

Please tell your doctor or nurse **straight away** if you get any of the following:

- Skin rash/irritation
- Headache
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea
- Abnormal blood results
- Diarrhoea
- Unexplained bruising/bleeding
- Persistent sore throat

## Are there any other treatment options?

There may be other treatment options but this will depend upon which part of your bowel is inflamed, and how severe the inflammation is. Please ask your doctor or specialist nurse if you have any queries.

## What if I want more information?

If you would like any more information about maintenance treatment or have any concerns, please talk to your doctor or nurse specialist.

The Inflammatory Bowel Disease nurse specialists can be contacted on:

IBD Nurse Telephone Advice Line:

- **0114 271 2209**

**Available Monday-Friday 09.00am to 11.00 am**

The Medicines Advice Line on:

- **0114 271 3401**  
Monday to Friday, 2am - 5pm

## Helpful information

Crohn's and Colitis UK

- **0845 130 2233**
- **[www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk](http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk)**





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