

Guidelines for rheumatology patients on biologic therapy

**Rheumatology
Department**
Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

In general, people who have biologic therapy for their rheumatic condition (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis) experience few side effects from this treatment, but there are certain situations when it may be safest to pause or stop taking biologic therapy. These guidelines are intended to provide general advice to further increase the safety of biologic therapy for its users.

When should I stop my biologic therapy?

There are a number of situations when your biologic treatment should be temporarily stopped such as:

- Before surgery or major dental procedures
- When trying to become pregnant or father a child. Please remember that other drugs such as methotrexate need to be considered too

The following table gives the washout period for each biologic drug – this means how long it will take for the drug to be eliminated from your body. It also gives you the recommended time to come off the drug before attempting to become pregnant or father a child. If you are considering stopping your biologic therapy for any reason we recommend that you discuss this with your rheumatologist.

Drug	Washout period	How long should I be off treatment before pregnancy or fathering a child?
Enbrel (etanercept)	15 days	3 weeks
Humira (adalimumab)	70 days (10 weeks)	5 months
Remicade (infliximab)	45 days	6 months
Simponi (golimumab)	70 days	6 months
Cimzia (certolizumab)	70 days	5 months
Roactemra (tocilizumab)	70 days	3 months
Abatacept (orencia)	70 days	Discuss with rheumatologist
Rituximab	Discuss with rheumatologist	Discuss with rheumatologist

Infections

Patients on biologic therapies are more likely to get infections as these drugs suppress your immune system (they are immunosuppressive drugs). There are some general, day-to-day things you can do to reduce your risk of picking up an infection, including:

- Washing your hands frequently
- Being careful with the food you eat and water you drink, especially when you are abroad
- Avoiding unpasteurised foods (e.g. Brie, feta and blue cheeses). Check the product labels as many supermarket-bought cheeses in the UK will be pasteurised
- Contacting your GP or the hospital early if you get a fever (temperature)

As a rule, if you need antibiotics (or other treatment) for an infection or have a severe virus you should stop your biologic treatment until you have recovered. Please remind your GP that you are on a biologic drug if an infection is suspected and show them your information card.

Chickenpox

Most people will have immunity to chickenpox, however if you are not sure and you come into contact with someone with chickenpox you should speak to your GP urgently.

Tuberculosis (TB)

TB has been seen in patients on biologic therapy and therefore you will have been screened for TB before starting your drug. However if you get a persistent cough, unexplained weight loss, a fever or are exposed to someone with TB you should seek advice from your GP or the rheumatology team.

Vaccines

Vaccination is a process that protects your body against infections. Most vaccines are safe for patients on biologic drugs and we encourage all patients to have annual flu jabs and a single pneumonia injection. **However you should not be given a live vaccine** – these include vaccines for:

- Yellow fever
- Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)
- BCG which is used to vaccinate against tuberculosis (TB)
- Chickenpox and shingles (this vaccine is currently being offered to all people aged 70 to 79)

If you do need a live vaccine then you should come off your biologic drug for six months before you have it.

There is more information on vaccines on the Arthritis Research UK (ARUK) website:

<http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/arthritis-and-daily-life/vaccinations.aspx>

Sun protection

Please be very careful to protect your skin when you are out in the sun. There is a small increase in some skin cancers in patients on immunosuppressive drugs. You do not have to avoid the sun all year, but taking a few steps when out and about in the summer sun or when on a sunshine holiday will help to protect you from sunburn and the risk of skin cancer:

- Protect the skin with clothing, including a hat, T-shirt and UV-protective sunglasses
- Spend time in the shade between 11am and 3pm when it is sunny
- Use a sunscreen of at least SPF 30 (SPF 50 for children or people with pale skin) which also has high UVA protection
- Tell your GP about any changes to a mole – if your GP is concerned about your skin, make sure you see a Consultant Dermatologist (on the GMC register of specialists) who is the most expert person to diagnose a skin cancer. Your GP can refer you via the NHS.

Can I find out more?

Please note that this is only a guide and we would encourage you to discuss your personal queries or situation with your rheumatologist or GP. If you have any problems or questions, please contact the Rheumatology Helpline on 01384 244789 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday).

If you have any continual side effects or abnormal symptoms you should seek advice from your GP or from the rheumatology team.

If you have any questions or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet please contact:

The Rheumatology Helpline on 01384 244789 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 0730510

ਜੇਕਰ ਇਹ ਲੀਫਲੈੱਟ (ਛੋਟਾ ਇਸ਼ਤਿਹਾਰ) ਤੁਸੀਂ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ (ਪੰਜਾਬੀ) ਵਿੱਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰ ਕੇ ਪੇਸ਼ਟ ਇੰਨਫਰਮੇਸ਼ਨ ਕੋ-ਆੱਰਡੀਨੇਟਰ ਨਾਲ **0800 0730510** ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਨੰਬਰ ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

यदि आपको यह दस्तावेज़ अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो पेशन्ट इनफरमेशन को-आरडीनेटर को टैलीफ़ोन नम्बर **0800 0730510** पर फ़ोन करें।

જો તમને આ પત્રિકા તમારી પોતાની ભાષા (ગુજરાતી)માં જોઈતી હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને પેશન્ટ ઈન્ફોર્મેશન કો-ઓર્ડીનેટરને **0800 0730510** પર સંપર્ક કરો.

आपनि यदि এই প্রচারপত্রটি আপনার নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে পেশেন্ট ইনফরমেশন কো-আর্ডিনেটরের সাথে **0800 0730510** এই নম্বরে যোগাযোগ করুন।

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0800 0730510 على التالفون Information Co-ordinator

مہم ضرورت اریلف ایٹ کوٹھا زبان (اردو) میں حاصل کرنے کے لئے روبروہائی ٹیلیفون نمبر **0800 0730510** پوزیشن کو-آورڈینٹر (مریضوں کے لئے معلومات کی فراہمی کے سلسلے میں) کے ساتھ رابطہ کریں۔

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