

# Starting a new biologic drug

## Rheumatology Department Patient Information Leaflet

## Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have been offered a new biologic drug to treat their rheumatology condition. It gives information on what these drugs are, what screening tests you will need and what happens next.

## What are biologic drugs?

In the past 20 years, there have been big improvements in the treatment of inflammatory conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

The greatest step forward has been in the development and introduction of biologic drugs. These drugs act on the specific parts of the immune system that cause the inflammation which leads to joint swelling and other symptoms. They are powerful and specific therapies and have changed the lives of millions of people with these conditions across the world.

There are several different types of biologic drugs that have been approved for use in people with rheumatology conditions in the UK. All these biologic drugs affect proteins or chemical molecules in the body that are involved in inflammation. They are:

- Anti-TNF drugs such as adalimumab, etanercept, golimumab, certolizumab and infliximab
- Tocilizumab
- Rituximab
- Abatacept
- Ustekinumab

We will give you an additional leaflet specific to the biologic drug that we prescribe for you.

The drugs are usually given by injection or by an infusion (drip) into your arm.

These drugs are all very effective but there are some differences in the way that they work and their side effects that may make one more suitable for specific diseases or individual patients.

All drugs do come with the risk of side effects and we have been monitoring these on an international level for many years. The greatest risk is a slight increase in infection.

For this reason, before you start any of these drugs, we will invite you to come to an education session that you must attend. These are run by the biologics nurse and the drugs are discussed in detail at the sessions. You may also be invited to take part in research studies.

## **Why have I been chosen to receive a biologic drug?**

You have not had success with standard rheumatology therapy such as disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs). Your rheumatology team think that one of the biologic drugs may help your condition.

## **Will I have to have any screening tests?**

In order to be eligible for treatment, we need to justify it using standardised screening tests such as:

- the DAS28 assessment for RA
- or
- the Bath Ankylosing Spondylitis Disease Activity Index (BASDAI) for ankylosing spondylitis

These will be organised by your rheumatology doctor or nurse.

For your own safety, you will need to have some blood tests and a chest X-ray before you start the treatment. If you have any risk of tuberculosis, you may need to have further tests with the chest doctors. If you have a lot of infections, or you have had cancer, please tell your rheumatology team.

## What happens next?

In the next two weeks, the biologic team will review the application for the drug, your chest X-ray and blood test results, plus any other medical considerations.

If these are all satisfactory, we will complete the additional paperwork and phone to invite you to attend the education session. If you cannot attend an education session, please discuss this with the biologic team and we will make other arrangements.

Once you have attended the education session, we will order the drug. This will be delivered to your home. The company who provides the drugs, usually Healthcare at Home, will contact you directly to organise a delivery time that suits you. They will also organise for a nurse to visit you to teach you how to give yourself the drug.

Alternatively, if you need to have the drug through a drip, we will invite you to attend the Day Case Unit at the hospital to have it.

We will give you a detailed information sheet about the specific drug you are having.

One of the reasons we are able to prescribe these drugs is because patients in the past have contributed to research. For this reason, we may invite you to help us with on-going research projects. However, it is your decision as to whether you take part in these.

## Follow up care

Your rheumatology team will monitor you closely. You should receive an appointment to see the team for three months after you start the drug.

However, if you have any problems before this, please contact the rheumatology helpline on 01384 244789. This is an answer machine so please do not use this helpline in an emergency. For emergencies, contact your GP or go to your nearest A&E.

## Can I find out more?

You may like to read more about the drugs in the orange Arthritis Research campaign booklets from the clinic or from these websites:

### **National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society**

[www.nras.org.uk/data/files/Publications/Biologics.pdf](http://www.nras.org.uk/data/files/Publications/Biologics.pdf)

### **Arthritis Research UK**

<http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/>

### **NHS Choices**

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Rheumatoid-arthritis/Pages/Treatment.aspx>

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**

This is an answer machine so please do not use this helpline in an emergency. For emergencies, contact your GP or go to your nearest A&E.

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

### **This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/rheumatology/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [patient.information@dgh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@dgh.nhs.uk)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

للحصول على هذه النشرة بحجم أكبر، وعلى شكل إصدار صوتي و بلغات أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بالرقم 08000730510.

此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਰੀਕਾਰਡ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਸਰੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ, 0800 073 0510 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜੀ।

Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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