

CHLOROQUINE

What is Chloroquine used for?

Chloroquine is used to treat diseases such as:

- Rheumatoid arthritis, and occasionally for osteoarthritis ('old age' arthritis)
- SLE (Lupus)
- Dermatomyositis

It is usually used together with other medication (such as Methotrexate) Chloroquine is better known as a treatment for malaria, but is no longer used much for this these days.

How does Chloroquine work?

Chloroquine is part of a group of drugs known as 'DMARDS' – Disease Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs. It dampens down an overactive immune system. Chloroquine works slowly - it may take several weeks before you start to feel better.

How is Chloroquine taken?

Chloroquine is very bitter so take it with food. Depending on your weight, your doctor will prescribe 1 tablet each day from Monday to Friday and then SKIP Saturday and Sunday. Some people will only take 1 tablet 2 to 3 times a week. If you are unsure please check with your doctor or pharmacist.

What are some of the side effects of Chloroquine?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only minor side effects with Chloroquine. As often happens with new medication, you may have some nausea or diarrhoea at first – this should settle.

Things to look out for:

- Rash: if this happens, stop the medication and see your doctor as soon as possible
- Sun sensitivity: Chloroquine may cause you to burn more easily in the sun.
Remember to use SUNSCREEN!

After many years of using chloroquine, some patients notice skin colour changes (grey or brownish). Please talk to your doctor if you are worried. Eyes:

- Although not very common, Chloroquine can affect your vision, although usually this is after using the treatment for more than 10 years. Your doctor may suggest an eye check when starting chloroquine treatment
- Many people experience changes in their vision (halo's, dots and blots) in the first few months of using chloroquine. This is not a sign of early eye problems – your body is just adjusting to the new treatment.
- After 5-8 years of taking chloroquine your eyes need to be tested again. This will continue every year while you continue on treatment so that we can pick up problems early and prevent any complications.

Contact us:

- Talk to your rheumatologist and rheumatology nurse at your next appointment or phone during clinic times (021) 404 5394 (Monday or Friday) or (021) 404 5313 (Thursday)
- The SA arthritis foundation (www.arthritis.org.za, 021 425 2344) is the charity leading the fight against arthritis, and offers online or telephone advice.