

CYCLOPHOSPHAMIDE

WHAT IS CYCLOPHOSPHAMIDE?

Cyclophosphamide belongs to a group of medications called *immunosuppressants*. These are medications that suppresses (slow down) your immune system (the part of your body that usually fights off germs and sicknesses)

What is it used for?

Cyclophosphamide is used to treat severe conditions such as Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (Lupus or SLE), vasculitis and rheumatoid arthritis. These are *autoimmune diseases* which are sicknesses where your own immune system, which usually fights off germs, accidentally attacks your own body.

Cyclophosphamide can also be used to treat some kinds of cancers.

HOW IS CYCLOPHOSPHAMIDE GIVEN?

Cyclophosphamide is usually given as an intravenous drip that runs in over an hour. It is given once a month for about 6 months (the number of months can be different for different patients). This will need to be done in hospital (you will start at the D6 clinic and then be told where to go from there) but you will not be admitted – you can go home once the drip is finished. Less commonly, it can be administered as a pill.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take Cyclophosphamide?

- About all of your other medications (prescriptions or over-the-counter, natural products, vitamins) and health problems including diabetes, porphyria, and liver or kidney problems.
- If you are allergic to any medications, any other drugs, foods, or other substances.
- If you are pregnant, planning to fall pregnant or breastfeeding. This drug may cause harm to an unborn baby. Avoid getting pregnancy while you are taking it and use family planning.
- How much alcohol you drink per week – it is better to avoid alcohol while using Cyclophosphamide
- Your doctor may decide to put you on a tablet called Isoniazid (INH) with the Vitamin Pyridoxine to protect you from TB, and Bactrim 3 times a week to protect you from pneumonia. You will usually be able to stop these medicines when the prednisone and cyclophosphamide is stopped

WHAT ARE THE SIDE-EFFECTS OF CYCLOPHOSPHAMIDE?

- **Upset stomach:** some people have nausea and vomiting with this medication. Your doctor will prescribe medications to help with this. At home, try to have smaller, more frequent meals.
- **Infections:** you may find that you get sick more easily while on Cyclophosphamide because it slows down your immune system. If you are unwell, please see your doctor as soon as possible.

- **Hair loss:** happens to some patients. However, once cyclophosphamide is stopped, hair usually regrows.
- **Fertility:** This drug may affect the ability to have children for both men and women. Please discuss this with your doctor before starting this medication.
- **Allergic reaction:** Rarely, some patients may have an allergic reaction to the medication. Please tell your doctor if you have pain, redness or swelling at the drip site.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

1. Cyclophosphamide has been prescribed.
2. You will usually be given a date for the administration of cyclophosphamide
3. The doctor will order some blood tests to ensure that your body is ready
4. The week before the infusion
 - a. Get your blood tests done
5. The day before the infusion
 - a. Get a good night's sleep
6. On the day of the infusion
 - a. Arrive in good time and report to the nurse's desk at the assigned place
 - b. The doctor will review your blood tests and evaluate you
 - c. If all is well, the doctor will fix an IV (drip) line
 - d. You will then be sent to the infusion centre
 - e. At the infusion centre, you will first receive some fluids and some medications
 - f. The cyclophosphamide will then be given through a drip for at least half an hour
 - g. Once finished, ensure you have an appointment for the next drip or the next clinic visit.
Also have a script for your next blood tests.
 - h. Go home. Get plenty of rest and stay well hydrated.
 - i. Maintain a positive attitude

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.