

LEFLUNOMIDE (ARAVA/RHEUMALEF)

How is it taken?

Leflunomide is a tablet (20mg) which is taken daily or alternate days at any time of day you

What does it do?

A type of drug known as a disease modifying anti-rheumatic drug (DMARD)
 Leflunomide dampens down inflammation in joints by reducing activity of immune system (the body's defense system) in patients with rheumatoid arthritis and psoriatic arthritis, and sometimes other inflammatory problems such as SLE and vasculitis.

How long does it take to work?

Usually this drug works within a week or two, but it may take a few months before you notice any benefit

Are there any side effects?

The most common problems are **diarrhea and stomach cramps**. You also may experience nausea (feeling sick), vomiting, mouth ulcers, hair loss or headaches. These usually improve after a few weeks. If any of these problems are severe, stop taking the tablets for 2-3 days and try restarting slowly- for example, using every second day then increasing after a week or two to daily.

Occasionally, white cell counts become low due to leflunomide leading to a risk of infection. Leflunomide may also affect **liver function**. Leflunomide can also cause **high blood pressure or worsen blood pressure control** if you are already on treatment.

For this reason, we check blood tests and blood pressure month after starting the meds, and then every 6 months. We also suggest blood pressure checks at your clinic visits.

Can I fall pregnant or breast feed while using Leflunomide?

No. Please take contraceptive precautions because if you fall pregnant, leflunomide may harm the unborn baby. If you plan on falling pregnant, tell your doctor so that leflunomide can be stopped 3 months before falling pregnant. Please talk to your doctor urgently if you are using leflunomide and you think you may be pregnant. You should not breastfeed while on leflunomide. Please talk to your doctor.

Are there any special precautions I need to take if I am using Leflunomide?

Avoid alcohol, or only drink small amounts (less than 4 units per week) because leflunomide and alcohol can interact to damage your liver.

Because Leflunomide dampens your immune system, you have a higher risk of infection. If you have fever, cough, sore throat, burning urine or any other symptoms that may suggest an infection, please see your day hospital or GP and explain to them that you are using Leflunomide. You may need antibiotics. Please phone us and talk to one of our doctors at the Arthritis Clinic. If you are very sick, you may need to come in to casualty (C15).