

## Pharmacy

DRUG INFORMATION

# Tocilizumab (Actemra)



## Tocilizumab

- Tocilizumab (Actemra) works by blocking off excessive inflammatory proteins which are present in patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA). As a result, Tocilizumab helps to reduce inflammation, pain and swelling.
- Tocilizumab is used to treat patients with moderate to severe RA whose symptoms do not improve after treatment with other standard drugs. Your doctor may also prescribe Tocilizumab for other conditions such as Giant Cell Arteritis and Adult Still's Disease.

## How is Tocilizumab Administered?

- Tocilizumab can be given as a drip into the vein (intravenous, IV) or as a subcutaneous (SC) injection under the skin at the following sites: front of thighs, at the lower abdomen (at least 2 inches away from the belly button) or at the upper outer arms.
- Avoid injecting above scars, stretch marks or areas where the skin is painful, bruised, red, scaly or hard. Do also remember to rotate the injection site each time. Before administering tocilizumab on your own, you or your carer should receive training from a rheumatology nurse clinician or pharmacist.
- The dose of Tocilizumab will depend on the disease condition and its severity.
- Tocilizumab does not work immediately and you may only observe its effects weeks to months later. Thus, it is important that you continue with your medication or you may not benefit from the treatment at all.
- If you miss a dose, inject the missed dose as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose, inject the usual dose. Do not double the dosage.

## Can Tocilizumab be Administered With Other Medications?

- Tocilizumab can be used on its own or with another standard medication(s) such as methotrexate, steroids or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

- Please inform your doctor, pharmacist or rheumatology nurse clinician if you are taking other medications, including over-the-counter medicines, supplements, or traditional / herbal remedies as they may interact with Tocilizumab.

### What Should I Tell My Doctor Before Starting Treatment With Tocilizumab?

Before starting Tocilizumab, you should inform your rheumatologist if you have any of the following:

- Hepatitis B or other liver conditions
- Tuberculosis
- Diverticulitis or stomach/intestine ulcers
- Other medical problems including Diabetes Mellitus, High Cholesterol, High Blood Pressure and kidney problems.

Before receiving Tocilizumab, you should inform your rheumatologist/ nurse clinician if you have an infection. Symptoms of an infection include:

- Fever, chills or rigors (shivering on top of fever)
- Cough, runny nose or sore throat
- Vomiting, diarrhoea, or stomach pain
- Burning sensation when you urinate or urinating more often than normal

### What are the Important Side Effects of Tocilizumab?

- Medications prescribed by your doctor should be beneficial for your condition even though they may result in some side effects.

Side Effect	Management
Infusion-related reaction or allergic reaction (e.g. fever, drop in blood pressure, itching with flushing (redness), fast heartbeat, shortness of breath)	<p>Infusion will be stopped immediately.</p> <p>If the reaction is mild, it may be treated with medications such as paracetamol and anti-histamines.</p> <p>If the reaction is severe, seek medical attention immediately.</p>

Side Effect	Management
<p>Infection</p> <p><b>(Warning signs:</b> fever of more than 38°C, chills, tiredness, cough, painful urination, red and tender skin, shingles, cold sores)</p>	<p>Seek medical attention immediately.</p> <p>Inform the doctor that you are receiving Tocilizumab.</p>
Headache, Dizziness	<p>These may be managed with symptomatic medications.</p> <p>Inform your doctor if this is persistent or becomes severe.</p>
Increased blood pressure or high cholesterol	<p>Monitor your blood pressure and cholesterol regularly.</p> <p>Your doctor may prescribe or adjust your existing medication(s) to control your blood pressure or cholesterol.</p>
Blood disorders (e.g. low white blood cells, low platelets)	<p>It is important to monitor the effects of your new treatment, particularly during the first three months of treatment.</p> <p>Your doctor will order regular blood tests for monitoring.</p>
<p>Liver disorder</p> <p><b>(Warning signs:</b> Yellowing of eye whites or skin, dark or tea-coloured urine or constant stomach pain)</p>	<p>Consult your doctor immediately.</p> <p>Your doctor will do blood tests to check if this occurs.</p>

Side Effect	Management
Bowel perforation (rare) <b>(Warning signs:</b> persistent stomach pain, blood in stool)	Seek medical attention immediately.  Inform your doctor if you have a history of diverticulitis.
Nerve disorders (rare) <b>(Warning signs:</b> blurred vision, muscle weakness, imbalance, numbness, tremor or unusual tiredness)	Seek medical attention immediately.

If you develop rashes, facial swelling or shortness of breath after taking Tocilizumab, you could be allergic to the medication. Please seek medical attention immediately.

### Are There any Special Precautions That I Need to Take?

#### Vaccinations

- It is recommended that you avoid live vaccines such as MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), yellow fever, varicella-zoster, BCG (tuberculosis), typhoid when you are on Tocilizumab. Influenza and pneumococcal vaccines are recommended.

#### Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

- Until more information is known about its effects on the unborn baby, you should not use Tocilizumab if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. Women should adopt effective contraception while receiving Tocilizumab and for six months after stopping Tocilizumab. Please inform your rheumatologist if you are planning to conceive.
- You should not breastfeed while receiving Tocilizumab.

#### Surgical Operation

- If you are scheduled for an operation, please inform your rheumatologist. Intravenous (IV) Tocilizumab should be stopped at least four weeks before

surgery. For subcutaneous (SC) Tocilizumab injected on your own, stop the medication at least two weeks before surgery.

### What Else can I do to Help My Condition?

- Stop smoking as smoking can worsen your condition.
- Avoid consuming alcohol as it can affect your liver.
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise and a healthy diet.

### How do I Store Tocilizumab?

- Store your medication in a refrigerator between 2 to 8°C. Do not freeze.

### How do I Dispose My Medication?

- After injecting Tocilizumab, the used syringe should be placed in a puncture-resistant container such as a used metal tin. You may bring the container to the pharmacy or clinic for proper disposal.

