



University Hospitals Birmingham
NHS Foundation Trust



Rituximab for immune haematology disorders

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www.uhb.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets.htm

What is Rituximab?

Rituximab is a medication used to treat autoimmune disorders. It belongs to a group of medications called “monoclonal antibodies” – this means that they can target specific cells or proteins (coatings on cells).

It works by recognising a protein called CD20 on the surface of one of the main types of normal white blood cells (B lymphocytes) and then locking on to it, like a key. The B lymphocyte is then destroyed by the body’s immune system. By reducing the number of B cells rituximab reduces the number of cells producing antibodies. Effectively, it suppresses a part of the immune system, and stops the immune system attacking a person’s own blood cells.

Conditions treated with Rituximab

Rituximab is sometimes used as part of cancer treatment but your doctor has recommended it to treat your blood disorder, which is not cancerous. Blood disorders treated with rituximab include immune thrombocytopenic purpura (destruction of platelets by the immune system) (ITP), autoimmune haemolytic anaemia (destruction of red blood cells by the immune system), antiphospholipid syndrome and thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura (TTP). Sometimes rituximab doesn’t work. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing whether it will work or not before starting.

If you have any questions about your blood condition, please speak to your doctor or clinical nurse specialist.

How/when/ where is it given?

Rituximab is given as a drip (intravenous infusion) through a vein over a period of 4 hours on our specialist day unit. The nurses will insert a

cannula (small needle) into the vein and will monitor you throughout the infusion with regular observations (blood pressure, heart rate, temperature) being done. Most people tolerate the infusion very well but as with any infusion, there is a risk of a reaction.

The nurses on the day unit will give you an antihistamine and a small dose of steroids to reduce the risk of you having a reaction. Subsequent infusions may be given over a shorter period of time if the rituximab is well tolerated. You will receive one infusion per week for a total of four weeks. If you cannot attend an appointment for the infusion, please contact your clinical nurse specialist as soon as possible so that they can rearrange it for you.

What are the risks?

Everyone reacts differently to rituximab and some patients may experience more side effects than others. Most people will tolerate the treatment without problems. Listed below are some of the side effects you may experience:

Low blood pressure: This may occur during the infusion so you will be carefully monitored throughout.

Flu-like symptoms: These can include a high temperature, facial flushing, chills, weakness, muscle aches, tiredness, dizziness and headaches. They may occur while the rituximab is being given, but do not usually last long.

Feeling sick and occasional vomiting: If you are feeling sick during the infusion, please inform the nurse who will be able to give you some anti-sickness medication.

Allergic reactions: You may have an allergic reaction to the rituximab. Signs of this may include skin rashes and itching, swelling of the

tongue, wheezing, a cough or breathlessness. You will be monitored closely throughout the infusion but if you experience any of these symptoms please let the nurses know.

Fall in blood counts: Sometimes blood counts (e.g. the white cell count) can temporarily drop after treatment. This usually recovers by itself.

Lowered resistance to infection: Rituximab can reduce the production of white blood cells making some patients more prone to infection. Generally, these tend to be minor respiratory infections such as coughs, colds and occasionally chest infections. In a rare number of cases, a small number of patients have developed a serious neurological infection known as progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy.

If you are concerned about this please speak to your doctor.

Follow Up

You will be followed up by your consultant in the haematology clinic. The timing of clinic appointments following treatment will depend on any symptoms you are having and any other treatments you are on. If do not have a follow up appointment booked, or have any other questions, please contact your clinical nurse specialist.

CNS contact details

If you have any questions or would like to discuss your treatment further, please contact your clinical nurse specialist.

For patients at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham please call **0121 371 7873** or **07825903534**. Alternatively, you can contact the CNS team via email on **haematologycnsteam@uhb.nhs.uk**

For patients at Heartlands hospital please call **0121 424 1557**.

For patients at Good Hope hospital please call **0121 424 9610**.

Alternatively, you can call the Johnson suite on
0121 424 9894 or **0121 424 9532**

For patients at Solihull please call **0121 424 1566**

Our commitment to confidentiality

We keep personal and clinical information about you to ensure you receive appropriate care and treatment. Everyone working in the NHS has a legal duty to keep information about you confidential.

We will share information with other parts of the NHS to support your healthcare needs, and we will inform your GP of your progress unless you ask us not to. If we need to share information that identifies you with other organisations we will ask for your consent. You can help us by pointing out any information in your records which is wrong or needs updating.

Additional Sources of Information:

Go online and view NHS Choices website for more information about a wide range of health topics <http://www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx>

If you have any questions you may want to ask about your condition or your treatment or if there is anything you do not understand and you wish to know more about please write them down and your doctor will be more than happy to try and answer them for you.



The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk/health-talks.htm or call 0121 371 4323.

Haematology

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