

Cyclophosphamide Patient Information Sheet

Why am I prescribed cyclophosphamide?

Cyclophosphamide is used for several different types of rheumatic disease, including systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), diseases which inflame the walls of blood vessels (for example polyarteritis nodosa) and sometimes for rheumatoid arthritis. It is a very powerful drug and has its effects on the immune system (the body's own defence system). One of its actions is to reduce the activity of the immune system, and is only prescribed under very close supervision. Cyclophosphamide is often prescribed along with steroid tablets.

When do I take cyclophosphamide?

There are several different ways in which cyclophosphamide can be prescribed. Your doctor will decide which is best for you and discuss this with you. The dose will depend on your body weight and may change depending on how you respond to the cyclophosphamide. The two main ways are as follows:

- (1) Low doses of tablets (usually once a day). These should be taken with a glass of water first thing in the morning after food. If you are unable to tolerate this please take your cyclophosphamide with or after food (preferably in the morning or early afternoon). Tablets should be swallowed whole, not crushed or chewed.
- (2) By injection into a vein (intravenous infusion). Your doctor will decide how frequently you should have these injections. These need to be given in hospital.

How long will cyclophosphamide take to work?

Cyclophosphamide does not work immediately. It may take 6 weeks or more to produce an effect, depending on the illness for which it is being given.

What dose should I take?

Your doctor will advise you about the correct dose.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember it. However, if it is nearly time for the next dose, skip the missed dose. **Do not take a double dose to make up for a forgotten tablet.**

Cyclophosphamide is not a painkiller. So if you are already on an anti-inflammatory drug or painkillers you may continue to take these as well, unless your doctor advises otherwise.

What are the possible side effects?

A common side-effect is nausea (feeling sick). Your doctor may prescribe medicine to reduce the sickness.

One very important side-effect of cyclophosphamide is inflammation and bleeding of the bladder wall (haemorrhagic cystitis). If this occurs you may notice blood in your urine

and you must report this to your doctor immediately. To reduce the risk of this happening, you should increase the number of non-alcoholic drinks each day to the equivalent of 8–10 glasses of water. Some doctors prescribe a drug called MESNA along with cyclophosphamide to try and reduce the risk of cystitis.

There is a slightly increased risk of certain types of cancer with cyclophosphamide. Discuss this with your doctor.

Cyclophosphamide can also affect the blood count (one of the effects is that fewer blood cells are made). Taking cyclophosphamide can make you more likely to develop infections. If this happens or if you have a fever, unexplained bruising or bleeding you must tell your doctor immediately.

Other possible side-effects include loss of hair, mouth ulcers, and irregular menstrual periods. If you develop these or any other new symptoms after starting cyclophosphamide, you should tell your doctor.

If you have not had chickenpox but come into contact with someone who has chickenpox or shingles, or if you develop chickenpox or shingles while you are taking cyclophosphamide, you should see your doctor immediately as you may need special treatment.

Do I need any special checks while on cyclophosphamide?

Because cyclophosphamide can affect the blood and the bladder, your doctor will arrange for you to have regular blood and urine checks while on cyclophosphamide. You may be asked to keep a record booklet with your blood and urine test results. Bring this with you when you visit your general practitioner or the hospital. **You must not take cyclophosphamide unless you are having regular checks.**

Can I take other medicines along with cyclophosphamide?

Some drugs interact with cyclophosphamide and you should always tell any doctor treating you that you are taking cyclophosphamide. Do not take 'over-the-counter' or herbal preparations without discussing this first with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Can I have vaccinations while on cyclophosphamide?

It is recommended that you should not be immunised using any of the 'live' vaccines such as polio, rubella and yellow fever. An 'inactivated' polio vaccine can be given instead of the 'live' polio vaccine and the inactivated version should also be given to people you are in close contact with such as members of your household. If you are on cyclophosphamide you should avoid contact with children who have been given the 'live' polio vaccine for 4-6 weeks after vaccination.

Yearly flu vaccines and pneumovax are safe and recommended.

Does cyclophosphamide affect fertility or pregnancy?

Cyclophosphamide can reduce fertility in both men and women and so, for young patients, it is used only with caution. The effect may be reversible when you stop taking cyclophosphamide.

Cyclophosphamide should not be used by pregnant women. As per arthritis research patients should use contraceptive precautions for at least 3 but ideally 6 months after treatment is stopped. If relevant this needs to be discussed with your GP and Obstetrician. If you are planning a family or if you become pregnant while taking cyclophosphamide, you should discuss this with your doctor as soon as possible. You should not breastfeed if you are taking cyclophosphamide.

May I drink alcohol while taking cyclophosphamide?

There is no particular reason for you to avoid alcohol while taking cyclophosphamide.

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Always Remember!

Check the dose of your cyclophosphamide tablets printed on the medicine container. Keep all medicines out of reach of children.

Please note that this information leaflet does not list all the side effects of cyclophosphamide. Always read the drug information leaflet which comes with your medicine.