Infliximab infusion for patients with Crohn’s disease

GI Unit
Patient Information Leaflet
What is Infliximab?

Infliximab (Remicade) is a medication that is used for patients with Crohn’s disease whose disease is severe and who have not had any success with other treatments.

Crohn’s disease is a condition where the lining of the digestive system becomes inflamed. Infliximab blocks the action of a protein called TNF-α which the immune system uses to cause inflammation in people with Crohn’s disease. The medication can therefore help to reduce inflammation although this cannot be guaranteed.

How soon will I notice the benefits of treatment and how long will they last?

Infliximab works quite quickly and some patients notice an improvement in as little as two weeks and have long term relief from their symptoms, but everyone experiences the effects of the medication differently.

It is important to remember that Infliximab is a treatment and not a cure.

How will Infliximab be given?

Infliximab is given by an intravenous infusion (drip into your vein). It involves the insertion of a small plastic needle (cannula) into the vein in your arm through which you will be given the medication. This takes about two hours but you will have to be at the hospital for about five hours to allow time for the pre-assessment checks, the infusion and monitoring afterwards.
How often are the infusions given?

You will receive a course of between one and three infusions depending on your condition and your consultant will discuss this with you. The infusions will be given over a period of six weeks. You may also need to continue the infusions on a maintenance programme, depending on how you respond to the treatment. This will be discussed with you by your inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) specialist nurse.

What preparation will I need for the infusion?

Before the infusion starts we will:

- Measure your weight, pulse and blood pressure
- Test your urine
- Carry out routine blood tests
- Give you a chest X-ray if you have not recently had one

You do not need to bring nightclothes but it is best to wear light non-restrictive clothing and to make your stay more comfortable please bring a book, magazines or a battery-operated personal CD/DVD player with headphones. You can also bring light refreshments with you although coffee and tea will be provided while you are at the hospital.

Will I be able to drive home after the infusion?

Infliximab does not make you drowsy but if you need antihistamines during your infusion these may make you drowsy. It is therefore a good idea to arrange for someone to drive you home.
Do I need to take any other precautions?
It is a good idea to have a seasonal flu jab. You should avoid having ‘live’ vaccines – these include polio, shingles and rubella (German measles) vaccines.

Always let your GP know that you are having Infliximab before having any vaccines.

What happens when I get to the hospital?
On arrival you will be asked to complete an admissions document with your named nurse. Your temperature, pulse and blood pressure will be taken before your infusion begins and these will be monitored during the infusion. If these tests are fine then a cannula will be inserted into your vein and the infusion will begin. Your named nurse will look after you during the time you are at hospital.

Will I have a reaction to the infusion?
During the infusion some people notice mild reactions such as itching or mild stinging of the skin. Other reactions such as chills, wheeziness and difficulty in breathing, low blood pressure and rashes can occur and, although rare, some patients can experience anaphylactic (allergic) reactions which can be severe and require emergency treatment.

If you experience any kind of strange feeling or discomfort during your treatment you must let your nurse know immediately. The nurse may slow the infusion down or, if necessary, stop it temporarily. These reactions usually settle quickly but in some cases require treatment with antihistamines or paracetamol. If the reaction is severe the infusion will be stopped.
Occasionally patients can have a delayed reaction to the infusion and feel unwell a few days after it. If you have a severe reaction you can contact the IBD specialist nurses on 01384 456111 Ext 2440 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday). Out of these hours please contact your GP, out-of-hours walk-in clinic or in an emergency dial 999.

**What side effects are there with Infliximab?**

The side effects may include:

- cough
- headache
- chest infections
- nausea
- diarrhoea

If you have an active infection at the time of the infusion this can be made worse by the treatment, however your nurse will have made appropriate checks and if you have an active infection the infusion will be put off until a later date. Any old infections such as TB can be reactivated and heart problems can be made worse but these things will have been taken into consideration by your consultant before your treatment begins.

Everyone's reaction to a medicine is different and so it is difficult to know which side effects you will have from taking a particular medicine or whether you will have any side effects at all. If you do have any problems it is important to let us know.

**What if I develop any infections during treatment?**

If you develop a serious infection you will not be able to have your next infusion so if you develop an infection of any type please ring your IBD specialist nurse on 01384 456111 Ext 2440 or your
consultant’s secretary as soon as possible. Please also let your GP know.

**Can I take my other medication whilst having Infliximab?**

Although your consultant will know what medication you are taking for Crohn’s disease it is important that you tell him about any other medication you take before you start on Infliximab. He will then advise you what to do about this medication.

**Does Infliximab affect pregnancy?**

New research suggests that there are no issues with males or females trying to conceive a baby whilst using Infliximab, although it is best to conceive when your disease is well controlled. If you would like to conceive a baby when you are using Infliximab please ask for advice from your IBD specialist nurse or your consultant.

If you are breastfeeding then treatment may be delayed until your baby is weaned.

**Can I drink alcohol during treatment?**

You can drink alcohol but it is recommended that you stay within the national guidelines for alcohol consumption which are:

- 21 units a week for men
- 14 units a week for women

(1 unit = half a pint of normal strength beer, one glass of wine (125ml) or one shot/one pub measure of spirits)

It is also recommended that you drink any alcohol evenly over the week rather than drinking a lot all in one go.
Can I smoke whilst having treatment?

Smoking is not recommended in Crohn’s disease and you will already have been advised by your consultant or IBD specialist nurse about this.

Please note that you are not allowed to smoke in the hospital.

What if I need more information regarding Infliximab treatment?

We want you to be as informed as possible regarding this treatment and your Crohn’s disease so if you want any more information please talk to your IBD specialist nurse, GP, hospital consultant or pharmacist about Infliximab. If you want, your IBD specialist nurse can arrange for you to talk to someone who has already had this treatment.

What are the alternatives?

This treatment has been offered to you because alternative treatments you have tried have not improved your disease symptoms. This will have been discussed with you already but if you have any further questions please contact your IBD specialist nurse.
If you have any questions or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet please contact:

IBD specialist nurses on 01384 456111 Ext 2440 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday).

.
This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 0730510