

Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil)

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at ndht.pals@nhs.net.

What do the tablets look like?

Hydroxychloroquine tablets are 200mg strength and coloured orange.

Why are you taking Hydroxychloroquine?

Hydroxychloroquine belongs to the group of medicines known as 'disease-modifying' or 'second line agents' that are used to treat arthritis and inflammatory disease. It suppresses the disease process by reducing the activity of the immune system.

As it is not a 'pain reliever' you will not notice any benefit straight away and it may take four to six weeks to see an improvement in your symptoms. The full effect may take up to six months to appear. You will need to carry on taking your other medication as well.

How to take Hydroxychloroquine

You will be taking a dose of 200mg to 400mg daily (one or two tablets daily). Depending on your response, you may continue on this dose or the dose may be reduced.

It does not matter when you take your tablet, but because Hydroxychloroquine has a bitter taste, it is better to take them with food.

Special precautions

Prior to commencing Hydroxychloroquine, we advise you have an eye check-up by an optician and then as a precaution have an annual review. Very occasionally long term usage of Hydroxychloroquine can cause retinal inflammation.

What to do if you miss a dose

If you forget to take your medication, **do not** double your next dose. Make a note of it and remember to tell your GP at your next appointment.

Can you take other medicines and alcohol?

Antacids, such as magnesium trisilicate mixture, should not be taken at the same time as Hydroxychloroquine. Allow at least four hours between taking Hydroxychloroquine and antacids.

Hydroxychloroquine is compatible with most other medicines. However, if you are taking digoxin, you may need additional blood monitoring. Always tell your GP you are taking Hydroxychloroquine before any other medicines are prescribed to you.

If you buy medicines over the counter at a pharmacy, also tell the pharmacist that you are taking Hydroxychloroquine.

You can drink alcohol in moderation.

Contraception and pregnancy

Hydroxychloroquine has been given safely during pregnancy and breast feeding. However, all drugs can potentially affect the unborn child. Men and women of childbearing potential are advised therefore to use a reliable method of contraception during and for three months after treatment. When planning a pregnancy, it is important that both men and women on this drug discuss medication with the rheumatology team.

Possible side-effects

- **Nausea, upset stomach, diarrhoea, abdominal cramps**
If you feel sick after taking your tablet in the morning, then take it last thing at night with food or a drink (such as milk or tea). This feeling of sickness usually goes away after a time as your body gets used to the treatment.
- **Mouth ulcers, sore throat or mouth**
Let the doctor know if there is a problem. If these symptoms occur with fever, chills or sweating, report it to your doctor immediately.
- **Thinning hair**
You may notice that your hair is getting thinner, but it will grow back when the treatment is finished.
- **Eyesight**
If you are under the care of the hospital ophthalmologist, please tell the nurse or doctor.
Hydroxychloroquine has been known to occasionally affect the eyes. However, as the dose that is given for treating arthritis is very small, problems are very rare indeed. Sometimes, the eyesight may be slightly blurred when treatment first starts. If this occurs, you should take care when driving or operating machinery.
If your treatment works and you continue to take Hydroxychloroquine for several years, we may refer you to an eye specialist for regular eye tests.

If you have noticed any side-effects, tell the doctor or nurse promptly.

Further information

If you need more information, or have any problems or have any queries about your medication, please contact your GP or ring:

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PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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