

# Leflunomide (Arava)

## 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](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net).

## About the drug

Leflunomide is a drug specifically developed to treat inflammatory arthritis.

## Why are you being prescribed leflunomide?

Leflunomide is one of a group of drugs that are called 'disease-modifying' drugs. It suppresses the disease processes by reducing the activity of the immune system. It usually takes four to six weeks, and sometimes longer, before you start to feel the benefit.

Leflunomide is not a 'pain reliever' and you should continue to take your other medications as well.

## Dosage

Please take 10mg round tablet once daily for one month. Then 20mg triangular tablet daily thereafter. You will take these doses under the guidance of Dr Stuart Kyle / Dr Roope Manhas (consultants).

## How to take leflunomide

Tablets should be swallowed whole with a good drink of water. They can be taken with or without food.

Check the label on your tablet bottle or box to ensure that you are taking the right dose of leflunomide.

## What to do if you miss a dose

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

## Can you take other medications with leflunomide?

Leflunomide is safe with most drugs, but if you are taking Tolbutamide, Phenytoin or Warfarin, you will need additional monitoring to ensure that your blood levels remain stable.

You can continue to take:

- The contraceptive pill.
- Painkillers and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs prescribed for you.

## What else do you need to be careful about?

**Having an autoimmune condition can reduce your body's resistance to infection. If you need a vaccination, it is important that you check with your GP first.**

Your body's resistance to infection is likely to be reduced whilst taking leflunomide. You should avoid close contact with people who have infections such as chickenpox. If you know you have been in close contact with somebody with chickenpox, contact your GP for advice.

You are advised to keep up to date with an annual flu vaccine and a ten-yearly pneumovax. You can arrange these at your health centre.

**All infections should be treated promptly. If you are aware of an infection, arrange to see your GP.**

It is recommended that you drink alcohol in moderation when you are having treatment with leflunomide. However, you can discuss this with your rheumatology team.

## Possible side-effects

**Common:**

- Mild to moderate diarrhoea

**Less common:**

- Rash or itchy skin
- Mild or moderate hair loss. This will resolve when treatment is stopped
- Raised blood pressure
- Headache
- Nausea
- Heartburn or stomach discomfort
- Mouth ulcers

If you develop any of these symptoms, contact your GP or the nurse promptly.

## Monitoring

As with many drugs used to control arthritis, we are reducing the activity of the immune system. It is important you know why we monitor you regularly when you are having this treatment.

- **Liver function test** – this shows us how your liver is coping with the drug. Very occasionally the treatment may need to be stopped.
- **Full blood count** – this drug can very occasionally affect your bone marrow.
- **Blood pressure**
- **Urea and electrolytes** – these are tests used to measure how your kidneys are working. If you have had kidney problems in the past, you should check with your GP or nurse before starting treatment.

## Blood monitoring

Your GP will arrange for you to have blood tests after starting treatment. This will be fortnightly for the first 6 weeks, monthly for 3 months and then 3 monthly thereafter. These are blood monitoring guidelines from the British Society of Rheumatology but your GP may feel that your bloods need monitoring more frequently.

## Contraception and pregnancy

As Leflunomide has the potential to affect the unborn child, if you are considering starting a family in the next few years, you will need to discuss this with the rheumatology consultant or nurse before starting treatment. Men and women of childbearing potential are advised therefore to use a reliable method of contraception during treatment and until blood tests confirm that your body has eliminated all traces of the drug.

## Further information

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

**Rheumatology Advice Line: 01271 322359**

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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](mailto: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](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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