

Cardiac services

Amiodarone

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet is for all patients taking amiodarone to provide you with information how to take amiodarone safely and how you will be monitored whilst you are taking this medication.

As with all medicines, you should make sure that you read the manufacturer's patient information leaflet (PIL) that comes with the medication, as well as this leaflet before you start taking amiodarone.

What is amiodarone and what is it used for?

Amiodarone belongs to the group of medicines known as anti-arrhythmics. It is used to control an irregular or rapid heart rate. Amiodarone regulates your heart rate and rhythm by acting on your heart muscle cells so that they contract (squeeze) in an organised manner.

Dose

It is usual to take a higher dose over the first two weeks to help the medicine work properly.

The usual starting dose is one (200mg) three times a day for one week, then one tablet (200mg) twice a day for one week, then one tablet (200mg) daily. You should take the tablets as prescribed or instructed with a glass of water. Amiodarone is not always needed long-term and should be reviewed regularly by your doctor. Ask your doctor how long you are supposed to take amiodarone for.

Do not stop taking your tablets without talking to your doctor first.

If you miss a dose of amiodarone, take it as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and continue taking it at the usual times. DO NOT double up on the dose.

What are the side effects of amiodarone?

Some side effects are only temporary and are not serious, such as feeling sick or having headaches. If these last more than a few days tell your doctor. Some other side effects will last longer. These side effects include:

Skin: Amiodarone increases your sensitivity to sunlight, which can continue for up to 10 months after you stop taking amiodarone. Avoid sunbeds and sun lamps. When you are in the sun, wear a wide-brimmed hat; keep your arms and legs covered. Apply factor 30-50 sunscreen to exposed areas of skin.

Amiodarone can cause your skin to look slightly grey/blue. This normally goes away once you have stopped taking it but please tell your GP if your skin continues to look slightly grey/blue.

Eyes: Amiodarone can cause small deposits in the cornea (clear front layer) of the eye. These are not harmful and usually go away when you stop taking amiodarone. These do not affect your daytime vision but bright lights at night may dazzle you or you may see a yellow halo when driving a car. If your vision becomes blurred or you cannot see as well as you could before, talk to your optician.

Thyroid: Amiodarone can cause your thyroid gland to produce too little thyroid hormone, which may make you feel tired or gain weight. It may also result in too much thyroid hormone making you sweat, feel shaky, lose weight or have a fast heart rate. If you notice any of these affects tell your doctor.

Lungs: Amiodarone can damage your lungs, which, can be reversed if detected early. Early signs of damage include a cough, breathlessness and a high temperature that does not clear up or gets worse. If you notice any of these symptoms, you should make an appointment to see your doctor as soon as you can.

Liver: Amiodarone rarely causes a problem with the liver. If you notice that your skin or eyes are becoming yellow, tell your doctor.

Heart: Amiodarone may slow your heart rate too much making you feel tired and dizzy. If you notice these symptoms, tell your doctor.

Other medications

Some medications may interact with amiodarone so you need to tell your clinician that you have been started on amiodarone, especially if they are prescribing something new. Before buying any over the counter or herbal medications, check with the pharmacist that it is safe for you to take them whilst you are taking amiodarone.

Do not drink grapefruit juice or eat grapefruit while you are taking amiodarone and for several months after you stop taking the medication. This is because grapefruit can affect how amiodarone works.

Alcohol

Do not drink more than 14 units of alcohol in a week.

- Standard pint of beer = 2 units
- Small glass of wine = 1 unit
- Single measure of spirits= 1 unit

Pregnancy

If you are of childbearing age, you should tell your specialist or GP immediately if you become pregnant or want to become pregnant.

Monitoring before and during treatment

A heart specialist usually prescribes amiodarone after doing a number of blood tests to make sure that your liver, thyroid and kidneys are working well. You will also have an electrocardiogram (ECG) which is a test of the electrical rhythm of your heart and a chest X-Ray which is a test that shows the condition of your lungs. If you are taking warfarin or digoxin, you may need to have extra blood tests done when you first start taking amiodarone to check that your blood levels are in range.

The following tests should be ordered by your GP.

| Test | Frequency |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Liver and Kidney Function | Every 6 months |
| Thyroid Function Tests | Every 6 months |
| Eye Test | Every 12 months |

Amiodarone can have effects in the body for a long time, even after you stop taking it. It is important that you have the above tests for up to 12 months after you stop taking amiodarone.

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk