

Rituximab (immunomodulation) treatment

Information for patients

Benefits of rituximab

Your doctor has recommended that you are treated with rituximab (the brand names are “Mabthera”, “Ruxience” or “Truxima”). This medicine is designed to target your immune system. If your immune system is over-active and causing symptoms, then rituximab can help by dampening this down. Rituximab can be used to treat immune mediated low platelets, low clotting factor levels, connective tissue disorders, vasculitis, and other immune-related disorders, in addition to haematological cancers.

How it is given

Rituximab can be given as a single dose or as four doses 1 week apart. It is given as a drip treatment into a vein.

Risks of rituximab

Certain people should not be treated with rituximab, unless in exceptional circumstances. This includes women who are pregnant or breastfeeding because rituximab may affect your baby’s immune system. Please let your haematology doctor know if you think you might be pregnant. We advise that all women of childbearing age should use highly effective contraception (such as the Mirena coil, implant, or sterilisation) for at least 6 months after treatment with rituximab.

Before you start this medication, we will talk to you about the possible side effects. Most patients experience no side effects or only minor side effects with rituximab. We have included the most important risks in this information sheet; for a more complete list please consult the information sheet at:

www.medicines.org.uk/emc/files/pil.8878.pdf



Side effects of rituximab fall into two groups: infusion-related side effects – that occur during the drip treatment itself or within a few hours afterwards – and late side effects, which may occur after weeks, months or years.

1. Infusion-related ‘allergic-type’ side effects

You will be given an antihistamine, paracetamol, and steroid treatment immediately before receiving rituximab, to minimise the chance of an ‘allergic type’ reaction. If you have a reaction, it can usually be treated by slowing or stopping the drip until you feel better, at which point the drip can usually be re-started. You will be monitored closely during your treatment, but it is very important to tell your nurse or doctor if you feel unwell or have any of the following:

- flu-like symptoms, such as headache, feeling flushed, fever, chills, or dizziness
- nausea or sickness
- red, warm, and itchy bumps on the skin (like nettle rash)
- swollen lips, tongue, or throat; wheezing, a cough or breathlessness
- pain in your back or tummy
- a tight chest or chest pain.

Sometimes an infusion-related reaction can happen a few hours after treatment. If you develop these symptoms or feel unwell after you get home, contact ward 206 straight away for advice: 0131 242 2061.

2. Late side effects

- **Infection** - Rituximab suppresses the body's immune system. This means that you are more vulnerable to infections, and this is likely to be the case for around a year after treatment with rituximab. If you are worried that you might have an infection at any time in the year after receiving rituximab, then please seek medical advice straight away.
- You should ensure that you are up to date with the influenza ('flu') and pneumococcal ('pneumonia') vaccinations. However, you should avoid any 'live' vaccines as these may be dangerous. Before receiving any vaccination, it would be sensible to discuss this first with your haematology doctor.
Sometimes rituximab may have an effect on your antibody levels or blood counts that would require extra blood tests to monitor your liver and kidney functions or extra treatments, e.g., for persistent neutropenia or low Immunoglobulin levels.
- **Reactivation of previous hepatitis B infection** - If you have previously been exposed to the hepatitis B virus then rituximab may cause this to reactivate.
- **Viral infections of the brain**- A very small number of patients who have been treated with rituximab have developed a serious viral infection of the brain (called 'Progressive Multifocal Leucoencephalopathy'). For patients who do not have blood cancer, the risk is thought to be very low – so that around 5 in 100,000 patients (0.005 %) would develop this. The infection causes damage to the brain and may lead to disability or death.
 - You should seek immediate medical attention if you experience any of the following symptoms in the years after treatment with rituximab:
 - Fever, persistent cough, weight loss or fatigue
 - Confusion, memory loss or problems thinking
 - Loss of balance or a change in the way you walk or talk
 - Decreased strength or weakness on one side of the body
 - Blurred or loss of vision
- **Risk of cancer**- Increased rates of cancer have not been reported in patients who have been treated with rituximab. However, any treatment used to suppress the immune system might cause a small increased risk of cancer in later life.

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I acknowledge that I have received the above information about Rituximab, and I am happy to consent to receiving these infusions.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Name of Doctor:

Signature of Doctor:

Date: