

Patient information factsheet

Pegylated interferon treatment for hepatitis B

We have given you this factsheet because you are starting a course of pegylated interferon treatment for hepatitis B. It explains what pegylated interferon is and what to expect from the treatment. We hope it will help to answer some of your questions. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of the factsheet.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver infection that is caused by a virus that is spread through blood, semen, and vaginal fluids. The infection causes inflammation (redness and swelling) and can cause scarring to the liver.

What is pegylated interferon?

Pegylated interferon is a treatment for hepatitis B. The treatment boosts and supports your body's immune system to help fight the hepatitis B infection.

How is the treatment given?

Pegylated interferon is given as a weekly injection for a total of 48 weeks. However, we may stop treatment early at week 24 if the hepatitis B infection has not responded to the treatment. If this is the case for you, we will discuss alternative treatment options with you.

You will need to give yourself these injections on the same day each week. You should inject yourself either in your tummy (approximately one inch away from your navel or 'belly button') or in the outside of your thigh. It is important that you change the site of your injection each week so that your skin doesn't become damaged. We will teach you how to inject yourself safely before you start the treatment.

Keep the injections in the fridge and remove them one hour before you inject yourself.

What are the side effects of pegylated interferon?

Like all medicines, pegylated interferon may cause side effects in some people.

A common side effect of this treatment is flu-like symptoms which typically start six hours after you inject yourself and last for approximately 24 hours. To help reduce these symptoms, you can take two paracetamol tablets an hour before you inject yourself, and then take them every four hours after. Always read the label or instructions before taking any medicine.

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Other common side effects include:

- irritability or low mood
- rash
- loss of appetite
- dizziness
- bleeding or unusual bruising
- fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- headaches
- insomnia (problems sleeping)
- visual disturbances
- reddening or bruising at the injection site

If you experience any of these symptoms, please contact us for advice.

Tips to help ease side effects

- Take your injection in the evening at around 6pm to minimise the experience of the flu-like symptoms.
- Aim to drink two litres of water a day.
- Keep alcohol to a minimum.
- Eat little and often (there are no dietary restrictions when taking pegylated interferon).

Will I be monitored while receiving this treatment?

While you receive this treatment and for six months afterwards, you will need to have regular check-up appointments with a member of our team at the hospital. This is so we can assess how well your body is responding to the treatment.

When you start the treatment, we will arrange to see you:

- once a week for the first two weeks
- then once every two weeks for the next six weeks
- then once a month until your treatment has finished and for the following six months

How often we ask to see you after this will depend on your response to the treatment.

At these check-up appointments, you will have a blood test. These appointments are also a good opportunity for you to ask any questions or discuss any concerns you may have. If you have any questions or concerns between these check-up appointments, please contact us using the telephone number at the end of the factsheet.

If your dose needs to be adjusted following the result of your blood test, we will contact you by telephone before 6pm that day to discuss this.

Are there any alternatives?

If your virus fails to respond to pegylated interferon, we may offer you an alternative treatment. We will discuss this with you if this is the case.

Contraception

We advise that you use two methods of contraception (condoms and one other) for the duration of your treatment and for a further six months after treatment. This is because there is a potential risk that if you or your partner become pregnant during this time, the treatment may cause a miscarriage (the loss of a pregnancy during the first 23 weeks) or it may affect the development of your unborn child.

If you think that either you or your partner is pregnant, please contact us for advice as soon as possible.

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Contact us

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us.

Hepatology clinical nurse specialists

Telephone: **023 8120 4617** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm)

Useful links

British Liver Trust

Website: www.britishlivertrust.org.uk

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