

Patient information factsheet

Intravitreal anti-VEGF injection treatment

You have been given this factsheet because your doctor has recommended intravitreal anti-VEGF injection treatment for your eye condition.

Intravitreal means 'inside the eye'. An intravitreal injection is when a medication or substance is given directly into the vitreous humor (jelly-like substance) inside the eye.

VEGF stands for vascular endothelial growth factor, which is one of the chemicals involved in growing new blood vessels in the eye.

Anti-VEGF treatment is used to treat some conditions that cause unstable, abnormal blood vessels to grow and leak under the retina (thin layer of cells at the back of the eye), which in some cases can lead to a rapid loss of central vision.

These conditions include:

- wet age-related macular degeneration
- diabetic macular oedema
- retinal vein occlusion
- and other retinal conditions.

What does the treatment involve?

A series of injections of anti-VEGF medicines are given into your eye to stop the blood vessels there leaking blood or fluid. This helps to prevent damage to the back of the eye and loss of central vision. The treatment is highly effective in preventing further loss of central vision in up to 90% of eyes that have been treated.

When will my appointment be?

Once it has been agreed that you will start the treatment, we will send you a letter with the next available appointment as soon as possible.

What happens during the treatment?

The medication is injected directly into your eye using a very fine needle. Anaesthetic drops are used to numb the area and minimal discomfort is to be expected. The procedure takes ten to fifteen minutes, but the injection itself is over in less than ten seconds.

The injection can be performed with you either laying down comfortably on the couch, or with you remaining seated.

Local anaesthetic drops will then be applied, and your eyelids and the surface of the eye will be cleaned to prevent infection. Further anaesthetic will be given, and a small clip used to keep the eye open.

The injection site will be marked, and a few seconds later, the injection will be given.

A member of our team will assess your vision after the injection, by asking you to state how many fingers are being held up. A flush of sterile water will be used to wash off any cleaning solution and reduce any irritation.

Will the treatment be painful?

Minimal discomfort is to be expected during treatment and it should not be painful. We understand most patients will be nervous about the procedure, so we will provide reassurance and all your concerns will be addressed before starting the treatment. Every step of the treatment will be explained so that you know exactly what is going to happen next.

Who will give the injection?

It will be given by either an ophthalmologist (specialist eye doctor), a trained nurse or registered allied health professional, such as an orthoptist, or optometrist.

What happens after the treatment?

- You will be allowed to go home immediately after your treatment.
- We will offer you lubricating eye drops to take home if you report any discomfort and may also check your eye pressure before you leave.

Aftercare and follow-up

- Your next appointment will be sent to you by post.
- We will give you an aftercare injection leaflet with a number to contact if you have any concerns.
- If you choose to use the lubricating eye drops, these can be used as often as you feel is needed. They must be discarded 28 days after opening.

How many injections will I need?

Most new patients require a course of four injections, at a minimum of four-week intervals with a scan on the day of the fourth.

Subsequent injection intervals will depend on how the eye responds to treatment.

Risks of intravitreal anti-VEGF treatment

As with any medical procedure, there is a small risk of complications following anti-VEGF treatment.

Your doctor will be able to discuss the risks and benefits specific to you, but for most patients the benefits of treatment outweigh the risks.

Most complications that occur are from the administration of the injection.

The following are the major potential risks and side effects of eye injections, but this is not a complete list of all risks.

Very rare (1 in 1,000 cases):

- serious eye infection
- serious inflammation inside the eye
- blindness.

Rare (1 in 100 cases):

- detached retina
- increase in eye pressure
- bleeding in the eye
- corneal abrasion (scratch on the eye's surface)
- cataract.

Significant loss of vision due to this treatment is very uncommon. Please ask your doctor if you have any questions about risks and side effects.

Side effects of intravitreal anti-VEGF treatment

Common side effects that may occur include:

- **Red eye** which is caused by a bleed on the white part of the eye where the injection was given. This does not affect the vision and usually resolves within a week.
- **Sore and gritty eye** slight ache and discomfort lasting a day or two. You can use the lubricating drops provided to help manage this.
- **Blobs or small specks (floaters) in your vision** might be seen for a few days after the injection.

Is there anyone who should not have this treatment?

There is a possibility this treatment may not be suitable for you if any of the following apply to you:

- a stroke or heart attack in the last 3 months
- an infection in either eye
- infection anywhere in your body
- currently taking antibiotics
- you are pregnant
- you are allergic to anti-VEGF or any of its ingredients.
- you have recently been fitted with a pacemaker, and have not yet been reviewed by your cardiologist (heart doctor).

If any of the above apply to you, please let us know before your appointment, otherwise there is a risk your treatment may need to be cancelled on the day.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Anti-VEGF medicines should not be used during pregnancy. If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, discuss this with your doctor before your injection treatment.

If you do become pregnant while having this treatment, please inform your doctor immediately.

Anti-VEGF medicines are not recommended during breastfeeding. Ask your doctor for advice before treatment.

Other medication

Please continue to use any usual eye drops (for example those for glaucoma, if you use them) as normal following your injection.

Symptoms to look out for once you are back home

You might notice some discomfort and redness for the first few days after your treatment, this is perfectly normal and is often due to the nature of the antiseptic used.

When to seek urgent medical help

If you experience any of the following:

- your eye becomes progressively red
- sensitivity to light
- swelling
- pain
- your vision gets worse after the injection.

You should contact eye casualty immediately on **023 8120 6592**.

These symptoms can be a sign of an infection. Infections, if they do occur, usually develop between two and seven days of having treatment.

I intend to travel abroad, are there any special precautions?

Your injection should be given at least 7 days before you plan to travel. If you do intend to travel before this time, you should avoid getting water into your eye or swimming for 48 hours. If you experience any problems while you are away, please see a local ophthalmologist.

What should I do if I am worried after receiving my treatment?

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to the person performing your injection before you leave.

If you have any concerns once back home, please contact:

Monday to Friday

8am to 7pm

Southampton Eye Emergency triage line on 023 8120 6592

7pm to 8am

Contact NHS 111

Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday

8am to 6pm

Southampton Eye Emergency triage line on 023 8120 6592

6pm to 8am

Contact NHS 111

If you have a query about an appointment, please contact:

Macular AMD team: **023 8120 8467**

Diabetes team: **023 8120 6754**

Further information

For further information about the medicine used in your treatment please see the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) supplied.

Patient information factsheet

Southampton Eye Unit
University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
Southampton General Hospital
Tremona Road
Southampton
SO16 6YD

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Macular-degeneration/Pages/Treatment.aspx

www.macularsociety.org/ www.rnib.org.uk/eye-health

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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