

Information Sheet

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Low Dose Naltrexone (LDN)

What is low dose Naltrexone?

Naltrexone is a class of drug known as an opiate antagonist and is normally used in treating addiction to opiate drugs such as heroin or morphine. It has been used in the treatment of auto-immune diseases in the USA since 1985 but is relatively new in Europe. At a much lower dose (1.75 -.4.5 mg) it has been gaining popularity as a treatment for symptoms of auto-immune diseases such as MS.

LDN is administered orally in capsule form once a day.

How does it work?

Some research suggests that when Naltrexone is given at low doses it triggers a prolonged up –regulation of endorphins. This increase may have an anti-inflammatory effect which could be beneficial in the treatment of MS. It has also been suggested that LDN may be able to reduce injury to the nervous system by decreasing harmful effects of two types of chemicals called free radicals and excitotoxins.

What does the research say?

Following major interest in LDN from people with MS and the media several small pilot studies have begun to investigate whether there are any benefits on the quality of life for people with MS.

- Dr. Gianvito Martino (San Raffaele Hospital, Milan, Italy) and colleagues assessed LDN in an open labeled trial of 40 people with primary progressive MS for six months. At the end of the trial a significant reduction of spasticity was measured but an increase in pain was noted. However, no significant data on improvements in fatigue, quality of life or depression were found.
- The University of California in San Francisco published a study in 2010 involving 80 people with relapsing remitting and primary progressive MS. People on the trail noted a general improvement in their quality of life but

no changes in fatigue, bowel problem, sexual functioning or vision were noted.

Although the research has not found significant benefits, anecdotal evidence suggests that many Irish people use LDN. Some people report that it helps with particular symptoms or just with their overall well being.

What are the side effects?

The most common side effects included short term increase in liver enzymes urinary tract infections, mild agitation and sleep disturbance.

Is it advisable to take LDN and is it available in Ireland?

Naltrexone is currently prescribed in Ireland for a number of drug addictions. It is not licensed for MS as there is not enough evidenced-based research to prove LDN is an effective treatment for MS. For this reason Neurologists for MS are reluctant to prescribe LDN.

However, as LDN is available for prescription in general, some GP's prescribe it 'off-label'. This is a process whereby GP's can, at their own discretion, prescribe drugs for treating conditions the drug is not licensed for. Hence, some GP's prescribe LDN for their patients with MS. This is the decision of the GP.

What does MS Ireland think of LDN?

MS Ireland supports an evidence-based approach to research and as such does not recommend that people use unproven treatments that have not been through rigorous trials. However, LDN is well tolerated and currently prescribed in Ireland for other conditions. As with all treatments and intervention we encourage people to make informed decisions and choose treatment based on their own research and advice for healthcare professionals.

Further Information

<http://www.ldnaware.org/> - A portal to LDN information worldwide
<http://www.lowdosenaltrexone.org> – A collection of LDN research

Disclaimer:

MS Ireland provides information to the MS Community on an array of topics associated with MS. This information is for reference purposes only and medical advice should always be sought before any treatment or intervention is tried.