

Information Sheet

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AVONEX

What is Avonex?

Avonex is the brand name for a disease modifying treatment for people with MS. The active ingredient is interferon beta 1a, which comes in a solution or powder, and is given by injection. Interferons are proteins produced by the body to help fight off infection and regulate the immune system. Avonex is made of exactly the same ingredients as the natural interferon found in our bodies.

Who is prescribed Avonex?

- Patients diagnosed with relapsing MS.
- Patients with a single demyelinating event with an active inflammatory process, if it is severe enough to warrant treatment with intravenous corticosteroids, if alternative diagnoses have been excluded, and if they are determined to be at high risk of developing clinically definite multiple sclerosis

How is it administered?

Avonex is given as a once-weekly intramuscular injection, which means it is injected straight into the muscle. You only have to take it once a week so you can spend less time being reminded of your MS.

Avonex should be taken on the same day every week. It comes in three different forms (a powder in a single-use vial, a liquid in a pre-filled syringe and a liquid in a pre-filled pen). Your Avonex patient support nurse will make sure you or a member of your family are taught how to give the injection until you feel confident. You will also be given a video and patient leaflet describing how to prepare and inject Avonex.

Will I be given support whilst taking Avonex?

Avonex provides a qualified support nurse who will visit you at home if you choose. Support nurses can provide you with all the equipment you need as well as any information.

How does Avonex help my MS?

Avonex therapy may reduce both the frequency and severity of your attacks. This means you can have more time to live your life the way you want to with fewer interruptions.

Over time MS can become more serious and may develop into what is known as the secondary progressive stage. This does not happen to everyone but if it does it can mean that regardless of whether attacks occur, symptoms can become worse. Avonex can increase the amount of time before progression occurs. It has also been shown to specifically delay the chance of MS-causing cognitive difficulties.

What are the side effects?

As with any other medicine taking Avonex may cause unwanted side-effects.

Very common side effects:

- Flu-like symptoms - headache, muscle aches, chills or a fever
- Headache

Common side effects:

- Loss of appetite
- Feeling weak and tired
- Difficulty sleeping
- Depression
- Flushing
- Runny nose
- Diarrhoea (loose stools)
- Feeling or being sick (nausea or vomiting)
- Numbness or tingling of skin
- Rash, bruising of the skin
- Increased sweating, night sweats
- Pain in your muscles, joints, arms, legs or neck
- Muscle cramps, stiffness in the joints and muscles
- Pain, bruising and redness at the injection site
- Changes to blood tests. Symptoms you might notice are tiredness, repeated infection, unexplained bruising or bleeding

If you experience any of the symptoms outlined above you should call your doctor, MS Nurse or your Avonex Support Nurse.

How do I know if it is working?

It is important to know that even though Avonex can start working right away you may not feel better immediately. You will still experience symptoms and attacks whilst taking Avonex but this does not mean it isn't working. After a while you may notice that there are longer periods between attacks and that your symptoms are less severe than usual. A

number of clinical trials have shown that Avonex can change the long-term course of MS for the better.

How should I store Avonex?

If you are using the pre-filled syringes or pre-filled pen you must keep them refrigerated. Alternatively, if you are using the Avonex BIO-SET device you can keep them at room temperature. Neither devices must be frozen or exposed to sun light.

What happens if I miss a dose?

The Patient Information Leaflet states that if you miss your usual weekly dose, inject a dose as soon as you can. Then leave a week before using Avonex again. Continue injecting on this new day every week.

Do I continue to take Avonex if I am thinking of becoming pregnant or breastfeeding?

You must not take Avonex if you would like to start a family or are breastfeeding. There is some evidence to suggest that Avonex is associated with a higher risk of miscarriage. Also, its effect on a developing baby or on fertility is unknown. Talk to your doctor or nurse about the options available to you if you wish to start a family and are using Avonex.

Can I travel with Avonex?

Yes. To make sure the trip goes more smoothly, plan it carefully. First of all, get your doctor to sign the Avonex passport you have already been given. This explains why you need to carry needles and syringes with you while you are on holiday.

With pre-filled syringes you can order a cool-bag for use while travelling by calling the Avonex help-line. You can keep your Avonex in this while travelling. If you are flying, it is important to keep your cool-bag in your hand luggage as it may freeze whilst at altitude in the hold.

With Avonex BIO-SET device, carry your Avonex with you in hand luggage so that it will be kept at room temperature. You do not need to keep it refrigerated. Contact your Avonex support nurse for more information.

Source:

This information has been taken from www.biogenidec.com.

Further Reading:

www.msdecisions.org.uk

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.

