

Information Sheet

Plegridy

What is Plegridy?

Other names: peginterferon beta 1a

Plegridy is a disease modifying drug for relapsing remitting MS.

You self-inject Plegridy under the skin once every two weeks to reduce the number and severity of relapses. It reduces the number of relapses by about one third (30%), compared to taking placebo.

Most common side effects may include flu-like symptoms and injection site reactions.

Who is prescribed Plegridy?

Plegridy can be prescribed for adults with relapsing remitting MS.

Contraindications

Plegridy is contraindicated in patients with hypersensitivity to natural or recombinant interferon beta or peginterferon or to any of the excipients contained in the product and in patients with current severe depression and/or suicidal ideation. Initiation of treatment in pregnancy is also contraindicated.

Assessment before treatment

Before starting Plegridy, you should have blood tests to measure blood cell counts and check liver function. These blood tests will be in addition to the tests which are normally done to monitor MS.

Assessment during treatment

Once you've started treatment, you'll have blood tests to measure blood cell counts, blood chemistry and monitor liver function. The functioning of your thyroid gland will be checked regularly or whenever thought necessary by your doctor for other reasons. Your doctor may want to check your blood pressure, blood (platelet count) and the function of your kidneys.

How is it administered?

You self-inject Plegridy under the skin once every two weeks. Plegridy is supplied in single-use, pre-filled injection pens.

Your MS nurse will show you how to do the injections, discuss the practicalities and offer advice or training and ongoing support if you should need it.

To give your body a chance to get used to Plegridy and reduce the impact of flu-like symptoms, you may start on lower doses for the first two injections, increasing to the full dose with the third injection.

How does Plegridy help my MS?

Plegridy is a moderately effective (category 1.1) DMD; in clinical trials people taking Plegridy had about 30% fewer relapses than people taking placebo. In clinical trials, MRI scans showed people taking Plegridy had fewer, smaller or no new areas of active MS (lesions). Plegridy may also slow down the build-up of disability associated with MS.

What are the side effects?

Plegridy can cause side effects, although not everybody gets them.

Serious side effects

Liver problems (common – may affect up to 1 in 10 people)

If you get any of these symptoms, call you doctor immediately:

- Yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes
- Itching all over
- Nausea and vomiting
- Easy bruising of the skin

Depression –(common – may affect up to 1 in 10 people)

Call your doctor immediately if you:

- Feel unusually sad, anxious or worthless or
- Have thoughts about suicide

Serious allergic reaction (uncommon – may affect up to 1 in 100 people)

Call a doctor immediately if you get any of these symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling around the face (lips, tongue or throat)
- Skin rashes or redness

Seizures (uncommon – may affect up to 1 in 100 people)

Call a doctor immediately if you have a seizure or fit.

Injection site damage (rare – may affect up to 1 in 1000 people)

If you get any break in the skin together with swelling, inflammation or fluid leaking around the injection site, contact your doctor for advice.

Kidney problems including scarring that may reduce your kidney function (rare – may affect up to 1 in 1000 people)

If you get some or all of these symptoms, contact your doctor as they may be a sign of a kidney problem:

- Foamy urine
- Fatigue
- Swelling, particularly in the ankles and eyelids, and weight gain

Blood problems (rare – may affect up to 1 in 1000 people)

If you get any of these symptoms contact your doctor immediately as they may be a sign of blood clots in the small blood vessels that affect your kidneys:

- Increased bruising or bleeding
- Extreme weakness
- Headache, dizziness or light-headedness

Very common side effects- may affect more than 1 in 10 people

- Flu-like symptoms
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Pain in your joints, arms or legs
- Chills
- Fever
- Feeling weak and tired
- Redness, itching or pain around the place you have injected

If any of these are troubling you, talk to your doctor.

Flu-like symptoms – not really flu

Flu-like symptoms are most common when you first start injecting Plegridy. They gradually get less as you continue using your injections. See below for simple ways to manage these flu-like symptoms if you get them:

- Use your Plegridy injection just before bedtime. This may allow you to sleep through the effects
- Take paracetamol or ibuprofen half an hour before your Plegridy injection and continue taking it for up to a day. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist about the right dose
- If you have a fever, drink plenty of water to keep you hydrated

Common side effects – may affect up to 1 in 10 people

Speak to your doctor if any of the following trouble you:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Itchy skin
- Increase in body temperature
- Changes around the place you have injected such as swelling, inflammation, bruising, warmth, rash or colour change
- Changes in your blood which might cause tiredness or reduced ability to fight infection
- Increases in liver enzymes in the blood (will show up in blood tests)

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

Starting treatment with Plegridy during pregnancy is not recommended. If you are trying for a family, talk to your MS nurse or neurologist about whether you should continue to take Plegridy until you are pregnant.

If you become pregnant while on Plegridy, your neurologist or MS nurse may recommend you stop taking it.

If you want to breastfeed while on Plegridy, speak to you doctor first.

Uncommon side effects – may affect up to 1 in 100 people

Speak to your doctor if any of the following trouble you:

- Hives
- Changes in your blood which may cause unexplained bruising or bleeding

Other side effects – frequency not known

- Pulmonary arterial hypertension

Plegridy research

One large study has provided evidence to support the approval of Plegridy for multiple sclerosis:

- **ADVANCE** - Plegridy compared to placebo in the first year
ADVANCE was a two year study in 1512 participants taking either Plegridy taken by injection once every two weeks or once every four weeks, or placebo in the first year. At the end of the first year, Plegridy reduced the annualised relapse rate by 35.6% in the two weekly dosing group compared to placebo. Plegridy also reduced the number of brain lesions on MRI and the risk of worsening disability when compared to placebo.

When was Plegridy made available in Ireland?

Plegridy was authorised for use in Ireland in 2014, however the product was only launched and reimbursed in 2015. It is reimbursed under the Hi-Tech Scheme, so is available free of charge to those on the Long Term Illness Scheme.

Sources:

This information was taken from <https://www.mstrust.org.uk/a-z/plegridy-peginterferon-beta-1a> and from Ms Ireland's Access to Medicines Campaign Handbook - <http://www.ms-society.ie/pages/living-with-ms/information-centre/our-publications>

Further information was taken from the Plegridy Pre-filled Pen Patient Information Leaflet UK/IRL.

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. This information sheet is not intended as a substitute for advice from a medical professional.