

INFLIXIMAB (Remicade)

What is Infliximab?

Infliximab is a protein which blocks the action of Tumour Necrosis Factor alpha (TNF- α). TNF- α is a naturally occurring chemical that circulates in the blood. In Crohn's disease an excess amount of TNF may contribute to chronic inflammation in the gut. Therefore, infliximab may reduce the symptoms of Crohn's disease and help to achieve clinical remission.

Infliximab is prescribed for moderate to severe Crohn's disease that has not responded to other medical therapies.

Before starting Infliximab

Your doctor will organise a blood test and chest x-ray before starting infliximab. You will be screened for infections like tuberculosis and hepatitis and may require certain vaccinations prior to starting infliximab. You should not have any "live" vaccines once you start infliximab. Women may need a pap smear and your doctor may talk to you about family planning.

Smoking makes Crohn's disease worse. It is highly recommend that smokers quit Support can be provided to patients who want to stop.

How is Infliximab given?

Infliximab is given via a drip that is inserted into a vein in the arm. It is infused over 1-2 hours. You will have to come to hospital for a couple of hours to have this done. If it is difficult to have infusions at St Vincent's Hospital, the IBD team may be able to arrange for you to have infusions at another facility.

What dose will I need?

The dose of Infliximab is calculated according to your weight. When starting infliximab, you will have an induction regime, followed by maintenance doses every 8 weeks.

Induction			Review	Maintenance
<i>Week 0</i>	<i>Week 2</i>	<i>Week 6</i>	<i>Week 8 - 12</i>	<i>Week 14, ongoing</i>
Dose 1	Dose 2	Dose 3	Review with Gastroenterologist	Maintenance doses every 8 weeks

What do I do if I forget a dose?

If you forget to attend an infusion appointment, contact the St Vincent's Hospital Medihotel on (03) 9288 3030. If you have your infusions at another location, you must contact the infusion centre directly.

Routine monitoring and follow up

Once started on Infliximab, you will need a blood test every 2 months and an appointment to see your gastroenterologist every 3 months for routine check-ups. You can have bloods taken on the same day as your infusion. If you become unwell, you may need more frequent blood tests and

check-ups. Please contact the IBD helpline (03) 9288 3592 or your private gastroenterologist's rooms if you feel unwell.

What are the side effects of Infliximab?

<i>Common side effects:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infusion reactions: difficulty breathing, rash, low blood pressure and headache• Viral & respiratory infections (eg. common cold)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abnormal liver function• Abdominal pain• Nausea & diarrhoea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dry skin• Dizziness
<i>Uncommon but important side effects:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Serious infections• High blood pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mild skin problems• Joint and muscle aches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slow wound healing• Back pain
<i>Rare side effects:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reactivation of tuberculosis or hepatitis B• Lymphoma	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Narrowing of the bowel in patients with strictures or extensive ulcers

If you experience symptoms of a severe allergic reaction such as difficulty breathing or swallowing, swelling of the face, lips, mouth, eyes and throat or hives, you should call an ambulance (000) or go to your nearest Emergency Department.

Pregnancy and Infliximab

As with any medication, women of childbearing age should take special care when taking infliximab. If you are pregnant or are planning a pregnancy, please inform your gastroenterologist so they can discuss treatment options with you.

Travel and Infliximab

If you are planning to travel overseas, please inform your gastroenterologist or IBD nurse. You may need some additional advice with planning before you travel.

What do I do if I feel unwell?

Infliximab can lower your immune system making you more prone to infection. If you develop a chest infection, you should visit your GP who may prescribe a course of antibiotics to help you recover more quickly.

If you experience symptoms of an infection, fever, feel generally unwell (malaise), vomiting or diarrhoea (more than normal), severe abdominal pain or if you have any general concerns about your health, please contact the St Vincent's IBD Team.

Who do I contact for help?

You can contact the IBD Helpline on (03) 9288 3592 business hours. Private patients can contact their gastroenterologist's private rooms directly.

For urgent matters outside of business hours, you can call the St Vincent's Hospital Switchboard on (03) 9288 2211 and ask to speak with the Gastroenterologist Registrar on call. In an emergency you should go to your local Emergency Department or call an ambulance (dial 000).