



Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)

Patient information

5-ASA drugs

5-amino salicylic acids, 5-ASAs include:

Asacol, Balsalazide, Pentasa, Mezavant and Salazopyrin

If you are allergic to aspirin you must tell your doctor or IBD nurse before taking these drugs.

Why do we need 5-ASA treatment?

Maintenance treatment is the long term use of a drug to control symptoms and maintain remission in IBD. These drugs are thought to reduce “flare ups” by having an anti-inflammatory effect on the lining of the bowel wall.

If you have a flare up the doctor or IBD nurse specialist may increase the dose of 5-ASAs and in some cases add in other medication, this could be other tablets, suppositories or enemas.

How and when should I take the 5-ASA?

5-ASA drugs may be given as a tablet, a suppository or an enema. The type of drug and dose depend on the site and severity of your IBD.

Tablets should be swallowed whole with a glass of water. If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If it is nearly time for your next dose, miss out the one you forgot. Do not double up.

Suppository and enema treatments are usually prescribed for inflammation in the lower end of the bowel. This is so they can be given directly to the affected area. They should be given after you have opened your bowels. They can give you the feeling that you may need to open your bowels again but this should pass. The longer you can keep the medication in then the better it works.

Will I need to have any tests?

You will need a blood test at least once a year.

What are the potential side effects?

- Skin rash/irritation
- Headache
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Persistent sore throat
- Abnormal blood results
- Unexplained bruising/bleeding
- Hair loss (less than 1 in 10,000 patients and is usually reversible if stop the treatment).

Can I drink alcohol whilst on 5-ASAs?

Yes in moderation as per the national guidelines.

Do 5-ASAs affect fertility or pregnancy?

Sulphasalazine is known to reduce sperm count in men. On stopping the drug the sperm count returns to normal. If you are planning a family your doctor or nurse will discuss changing you to an alternative 5-ASA treatment.

Women who are planning to become pregnant should discuss their treatment options with their doctor or IBD nurse specialist. It is recommended to plan conception during remission. You should continue maintenance 5-ASA therapy throughout pregnancy as an uncontrolled flare up of IBD can be more harmful to the developing baby than the 5-ASA drugs.

Balsalazide is not recommended in pregnancy: therefore if you are taking this you will be changed to an alternative 5-ASA drug.

How long will I need to take these drugs?

5-ASA drugs are designed to be taken as maintenance therapy and are increased to treat flare ups. You may need to take them for many years, even when you are well as not taking them regularly will increase the risk of a flare up.