



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



Ospidéal Ollscoile Chorcaí  
Cork University Hospital

Department of Rheumatology

## Sulphasalazine (Salazopyrin EN) Patient Information Sheet

### Why am I prescribed Sulphasalazine?

Sulphasalazine can reduce the symptoms and slow the progress of rheumatoid arthritis and other types of arthritis, such as arthritis associated with psoriasis. It may reduce the inflammation in your joints and decrease pain, swelling and stiffness. It is generally prescribed as Salazopyrin EN. This is the trade name for Sulphasalazine which is specially coated so that it does not dissolve quickly in the stomach.

### When do I take Sulphasalazine?

Sulphasalazine tablets should be taken after meals with a glass of water. Do not crush or chew the tablets. They should be swallowed whole. Do not take with antacids.

### How long will Sulphasalazine take to work?

Sulphasalazine does not work immediately. It may take at least 12 weeks before you notice any benefit.

### What dose should I take?

Your doctor will advise you. Usually you will start on a low dose, for example 500 mg twice daily, and your doctor will tell you how to increase the dose gradually. This is usually over a period of around 4 weeks. A typical dose would be 1 g (two tablets) twice daily.

Sulphasalazine is not a painkiller. So if you are on painkillers you can continue to take these as well, unless your doctor advises otherwise. It is also very important to drink plenty of fluids while you are taking Sulphasalazine i.e. 6-8 glasses of water each day.

### What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

If you forget a dose just take the next dose as usual.

### **Do not take a double dose to make up for a forgotten tablet.**

### What are the possible side-effects?

The commonest side-effects are feeling sick (nausea), diarrhoea, fever, abdominal pain, dizziness, headache and rashes. These side-effects usually occur during the first 3 months of treatment. Occasionally Sulphasalazine can affect the blood count (which means fewer blood cells are made). If you develop a **sore throat** or **other infection, a fever, unexplained bruising or any other new symptoms**, then you should report it to your doctor as soon as possible. Side-effects caused by Sulphasalazine may clear up if the dose is reduced.

Your urine, tears and sweat may change colour (to orange) with Sulphasalazine but this is nothing to worry about. Also, Sulphasalazine may stain soft contact lenses yellow.

**Your skin may become photosensitive so avoid bright light and sunbeds. Always use factor 15 or higher sun block.**

### **Do I need any special checks while on Sulphasalazine?**

Side-effects of Sulphasalazine on the blood or liver may be picked up at an early stage by regular checks on your blood. Your doctor will arrange these very important checks. You may be asked to keep a record booklet with your blood test results. Bring this with you when you visit your general practitioner or the hospital.

**You must not take Sulphasalazine unless you are having regular checks.**

### **Can I take other medicines along with Sulphasalazine?**

Most drugs can be taken safely. However, if you are to start any new drugs you should tell the doctor that you are taking Sulphasalazine. Do not take 'over-the-counter' or herbal preparations without discussing this first with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

### **Does Sulphasalazine affect fertility or pregnancy?**

Sulphasalazine can cause a fall in sperm count, and so can lead to a temporary decrease in male fertility, but this is reversible on stopping the drug.

As almost all drugs carry some risk when used in pregnancy. If you are planning a family or you become pregnant while taking Sulphasalazine, you should discuss this with your doctor as soon as possible. If you wish to breastfeed, you should ask your doctor for advice.

### **May I drink alcohol while taking Sulphasalazine?**

There is no particular reason for you to avoid alcohol while taking Sulphasalazine

### **Contact Details**

Dr. S. Harney, Consultant Rheumatologist ( <i>secretary</i> ):	(021) 4922422
Dr. J. Ryan, Consultant Rheumatologist ( <i>secretary</i> ):	(021) 4922468
Dr. G. Murphy, Consultant Rheumatologist ( <i>secretary</i> ):	(021) 4922468
Louise Murphy, Clinical Nurse Specialist in Rheumatology:	(021) 4234511
Joan Swan, Clinical Nurse Specialist in Rheumatology:	(021) 4922645

### **Always remember!**

***Check dose of your Sulphasalazine tablets printed on the medicine container.***

***Keep all medicines out of reach of children.***

***Please note that this information leaflet does not list all the side effects of Sulphasalazine.***

***Always read the drug information leaflet which comes with your medicine.***