



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



Ospidéal Ollscoile Chorcaí
Cork University Hospital

Department of Rheumatology

Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil)

Patient Information Sheet

Why am I prescribed Hydroxychloroquine?

Although the drug Hydroxychloroquine is used in the treatment of malaria, it is also effective for Rheumatoid arthritis, Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) and some forms of osteoarthritis. It can reduce inflammation and so reduce pain, swelling and stiffness of joints and improve the rash of SLE.

When do I take Hydroxychloroquine?

Take Hydroxychloroquine with a meal or a glass of milk to lessen the stomach upset. Some patients find orange juice useful to mask the after-taste. Swallow the tablet whole. Do not crush, break or chew it.

How long will Hydroxychloroquine take to work?

Hydroxychloroquine does not work immediately. It may be 12 weeks or longer before you notice any benefit.

What dose should I take?

Your doctor will advise you. Usually you start on a full dose, once or twice daily (for example 400 mg once a day or 200 mg twice daily).

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

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember it. However, if it is nearly time for the next dose, skip the missed dose.

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

What are the possible side-effects?

Hydroxychloroquine is typically well tolerated. However, a few people develop nausea and Diarrhoea, which often improve with time. Less common side effects include skin rashes, alopecia, tinnitus and headaches or blurred vision. Very rarely, long term use of Hydroxychloroquine may rarely damage the retina (part of the eye) in some patients. Stop treatment if your vision becomes blurred or if you experience a severe allergic reaction and contact your doctor immediately.

Do I need any special checks while on Hydroxychloroquine?

Before starting on Hydroxychloroquine your doctor may do a blood test to check your liver and kidneys function. Your doctor should also enquire about any visual problems at the start of treatment. You may be referred for an assessment by an Eye specialist after 5 years of continuous treatment.

Can I take other medicines along with Hydroxychloroquine?

Most other drugs can be taken safely with Hydroxychloroquine. However, if you start any new drugs you should tell your doctor that you are already taking Hydroxychloroquine. Indigestion remedies, including some 'over-the-counter' preparations can stop Hydroxychloroquine being absorbed so please leave a gap of 4 hours between taking them.

Do not take 'over-the-counter' or herbal preparations without discussing this first with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Does Hydroxychloroquine affect fertility or pregnancy?

Hydroxychloroquine does not affect fertility in either men or women. Risks to the unborn child are very rare and usually Hydroxychloroquine is continued in pregnancy to prevent a flare of the disease. If you are planning a family or getting pregnant while you are on Hydroxychloroquine, you should seek advice from your Doctor. Hydroxychloroquine reported to have no harmful side effects in breastfed babies. So breast feeding can be continued.

May I drink alcohol while taking Hydroxychloroquine?

There is no particular reason for you to avoid alcohol while taking Hydroxychloroquine however do not exceed the recommended weekly alcohol limit, (for men not more than 17 units, for women not more than 11 units).

Contact Details

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Always remember!

Check dose of your Hydroxychloroquine 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 Hydroxychloroquine. Always read the drug information leaflet which comes with your medicine.