

Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil)

GP Information Sheet

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Hydroxychloroquine is an anti-malarial drug effective in rheumatoid arthritis and systemic and discoid lupus erythematosus. Mode of action may be related to inhibition of cellular enzyme release and interference with intracellular function.

Administration

Hydroxychloroquine should be taken with a meal or a glass of milk. Some patients find orange juice useful to mask the bitter after-taste.

A typical dose regime may be:

200 – 400 mgs daily. Aim (3-5mg/kg/day)

Time to Response

Approx 2-3 months

Precautions and Contraindications

Hydroxychloroquine is contraindicated in patients with hepatic and severe renal impairment, women who are breast feeding and patients with eye conditions (maculopathy of the eye).

An eye test should be carried out if there is visual disturbance and for those > 60 years. Caution should be exercised in patients with epilepsy as it may reduce the threshold for convulsions.

Hydroxychloroquine should be used with caution in patients with severe gastro-intestinal disorders, in G6PD deficiency, acute porphyria and in the elderly.

Hydroxychloroquine may occasionally exacerbate psoriasis and aggravate myasthenia gravis.

Drug Interactions

Antacids decrease hydroxychloroquine's absorption so patients should leave 4 hours between doses. Cimetidine increases levels of hydroxychloroquine in the blood. Hydroxychloroquine antagonizes anti-epileptics but enhances digoxin.

Other interactions include insulin and metformin, the rabies vaccine, and ciclosporin. Avoid use with pimecrolimus, tacrolimus, amiodorone and moxifloxacin.

Side Effects

Mucocutaneous:

Pruritic erythematous macular rash occurring soon after treatment commenced. It may predispose to photosensitivity – sunscreen advised.

Blue-black pigmentation of skin may occur after many years of continuous use.

Gastro-intestinal:

Nausea, diarrhoea, abdominal cramps

Ocular:

Rarely irreversible retinopathy (maculopathy) but no cases of retinopathy described when treatment is < 10 years or when dose < 6.5mg/kg/day.

CNS:

Ataxia, dizziness, irritability, nervousness, nightmares, psychosis, seizure, vertigo.

Other:

Other rare side-effects include headache, cardiomyopathy, alopecia, anaemia, Stevens-Johnson syndrome, proximal myopathy, peripheral neuropathy, thrombocytopenia and agranulocytosis (very rare)

Please consult up to date relevant literature (data sheets) or (BNF) when prescribing this agent.

Please contact Rheumatology team if you have any other queries regarding the prescribed medication.

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, Candidate ANP in Rheumatology:	(021) 4920266
Joan Swan, Clinical Nurse Specialist in Rheumatology:	(021) 4922645
Daivda Hehir, Clinical Nurse Specialist in Rheumatology:	(021) 4234511