

## Leflunomide (Arava) Patient Information Sheet

### Why am I prescribed Leflunomide?

Leflunomide is used to treat rheumatoid arthritis and other types of arthritis where the body's immune system attacks its own tissues. It is a 'disease modifying' drug which by its action on the immune system, can reduce the inflammation that causes pain, swelling and stiffness in the joints.

### When do I take Leflunomide?

Leflunomide is taken in tablet form once a day. It can be taken anytime of the day with or without food. It is best to take it at the same time every day. The tablets should be swallowed whole and not crushed or chewed.

### How long will Leflunomide take to work?

Leflunomide does not work immediately. It may be 4–6 weeks before you notice any benefit and may even be as long as 6 months before you feel the full effect of this medication.

### What dose should I take?

Your doctor will advise you what dose you should take. Usually you will be prescribed 10mg or 20mg once a day depending on the severity of your disease.

Leflunomide is not a painkiller, so if you are on painkillers you may continue to take these as well unless your doctor advises otherwise.

### What should I do if I miss a dose?

If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the dose you missed and take your next dose when you are meant to. Otherwise take it as soon as you remember, and then go back to taking your medicine as you would normally.

Do not take a double dose to make up for the dose that you missed.

### What are the possible side effects?

The most common side-effects of Leflunomide are a feeling of sickness, diarrhoea, mouth ulcers, weight loss, abdominal (stomach) pain, headache, dizziness, weakness, skin dryness and hair loss. It may cause a slight rise in your blood pressure.

Leflunomide may cause mild allergic symptoms including rash and itching. Rarely, more severe allergic reactions and skin conditions can develop. If this happens, the Leflunomide will have to be discontinued.

Taking Leflunomide can also affect the blood count (one of the effects is that fewer blood cells are made) and it can make you more likely to develop infections.

If you develop a **sore throat** or **other infection, fever, unexplained bruising, bleeding or rash**, or if you become **breathless**, or **develop any other unexpected new symptoms** after starting Leflunomide, you should report to your doctor or rheumatology nurse specialist as soon as possible.

If you have not had chickenpox but come into contact with someone who has chickenpox or shingles, or if you develop chickenpox or shingles while you are taking Leflunomide, you should see your doctor immediately as you may need special treatment.

Leflunomide may affect the liver. This may cause problems ranging from abnormalities in the blood tests without causing ill health to severe liver damage which may be fatal. If you develop symptoms such as **unusual tiredness, abdominal pain, or jaundice** (eyes or skin turning yellow) inform your doctor at once.

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

Your doctor will arrange for you to have regular blood tests and checks on your blood pressure. You may be asked to keep a record booklet with your blood test and blood pressure records. Bring this with you when you visit your general practitioner or the hospital. **You must not take Leflunomide unless you are having regular checks.**

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

Some other drugs interact with Leflunomide and you should always tell any doctor treating you that you are on Leflunomide. You should not take over the counter preparations without discussing this first with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

### **Can I have vaccinations while on Leflunomide?**

It is recommended that you should not be immunised using any of the 'live' vaccines such as polio, rubella (German measles) and yellow fever.

An 'inactivated' polio vaccine can be given instead of the 'live' polio vaccine and the 'inactivated' version should also be given to people you are in close contact with, such as members of your household. If you are on Leflunomide you should avoid contact with children who have been given the 'live' polio vaccine for 4-6 weeks after vaccination. Yearly flu vaccines and pneumovax are safe and recommended.

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

Leflunomide may harm an unborn baby. Therefore it should not be taken during pregnancy. While taking Leflunomide both men and women must use reliable contraception. If you are planning a family, you should discuss this with your doctor. Women must wait 2 years between stopping Leflunomide and becoming pregnant.

The 2-year 'waiting' period can be reduced to 3 months if you receive a special 'washout' treatment to help eliminate Leflunomide from your body. Men are advised to stop taking Leflunomide, receive the 'washout' treatment, and wait 3 months before trying to father a child. If you become pregnant while taking Leflunomide you should discuss this with your doctor as soon as possible. You should not breastfeed if you are taking Leflunomide.

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

Because Leflunomide may affect the liver, you should ideally avoid alcohol while taking this drug.

### **Always remember!**

**Keep all medicines out of reach of children. Please note that this information leaflet does not list all the side effects of Leflunomide. Always read the drug information leaflet which comes with your medicine.**

### **Contact Details**

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