



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



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 and Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE). It can reduce inflammation and so reduce pain, swelling and stiffness of joints and improve the rash of SLE.

#### When do I take Hydroxychloroquine?

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

#### 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 (for example 400 mg or two tablets of Hydroxychloroquine) and later your doctor may reduce it (for example, to 200 mg or one tablet of Hydroxychloroquine). Some patients take Hydroxychloroquine only two or three times per week when their disease is very well controlled.

#### 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?

They are uncommon. However, a few people develop skin rashes, alopecia, tinnitus, indigestion, diarrhoea, headaches or blurred vision. Very rarely Hydroxychloroquine may damage the retina (part of the eye). 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 wish to take a blood test to check your liver and kidneys are working normally, but you will not need any regular blood tests. Your doctor should also enquire about any visual problems at the start of treatment and check your vision. 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?**

Risks to the unborn child seem to be small and sometimes Hydroxychloroquine is continued in pregnancy to prevent a flare of the disease.

If you are planning a family you should seek advice from your doctor.

Breast feeding should be avoided when Hydroxychloroquine is being used to treat rheumatic diseases.

### **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.**