

## SULFASALAZINE (Salazopyrin, Pyralin)

### What is Sulfasalazine?

Sulfasalazine is a drug that is used to treat mild to moderate ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease that is located in the large bowel. It is a type of drug called 5-aminosalicylic acid (5-ASA).

Sulfasalazine is often used as a first line medication in inflammatory bowel disease to achieve and maintain disease remission, as well as prevent relapse. It works to control inflammation at the lining of the bowel wall.

People who are allergic to sulphur should not take sulfasalazine.

### How do I take it?

Sulfasalazine can be taken orally, after a meal and swallowed whole with a glass of water. When commencing sulfasalazine, start by taking 1 tablet once a day for 3 days, then 1 tablet twice a day for 3 days, then increase to 2 tablets twice a day thereafter. Your gastroenterologist will determine an appropriate dose and regime based on your condition. It is important to drink plenty of fluids when taking sulfasalazine.

### What if I forget a dose?

If you are taking the drug ONCE a day and you forget a dose of sulfasalazine, take it as soon as you remember. If you are taking the drug MORE THAN ONCE a day and forget a dose, skip this dose and continue as usual. Do not double up on the dose.

### Can I take other medications?

Sulfasalazine can be taken with other medicines but can interact with some medications like digoxin and folic acid. It is important you tell your doctor about any other medicines you are taking. This includes over-the-counter medicines, patches, eye drops, and herbal or alternative therapies.

### Routine monitoring and follow up

When starting sulfasalazine you will need regular blood tests to check your blood count and for liver inflammation. You will also need regular follow up appointments with your gastroenterologist. If your blood tests are stable after 2 – 3 months, you will need bloods tests 6 – 12 monthly and may have your folic acid levels checked. If you become unwell or your blood tests are abnormal, you may require more frequent monitoring or have your dose of sulfasalazine adjusted.

### What are the side effects?

Sulfasalazine is well tolerated by most people. Many side effects that can occur will stop after the dose is reduced. Taking an enteric coated preparation of sulfasalazine can also reduce side effects.

Common side effects of sulfasalazine include headache, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, reduced sperm count in men (reversible) and rash. Uncommon but important side effects include dizziness, fever, abdominal pain, abnormal liver function tests, anaemia and low blood count. Rare side effects include hair loss, sensitivity to the sun and inflammation of the liver or pancreas. A severe allergic reaction is very rare side effect of sulfasalazine.

### **Pregnancy and Sulfasalazine**

Sulfasalazine is generally considered safe in pregnancy. If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy you will need to take a folic acid supplement. Please inform your doctor so they can discuss treatment options with you.

### **Who do I contact for help?**

You can contact the IBD Helpline on (03) 9288 3592 during business hours. Private patients can contact their gastroenterologist's private rooms directly.

For urgent matters outside of business hours, contact the St Vincent's Hospital Switchboard on (03) 9288 2211. Ask to speak with the gastroenterologist on call. In an emergency you should go to your local Emergency Department or call an ambulance (dial 000).