

## CYCLOSPORIN (Cyclosporin, Neoral)

### What is Cyclosporin?

Cyclosporin is a drug that is used to treat moderate to severe ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. It is sometimes used in patients with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that has been difficult to control, for example with multiple courses of steroid therapy or azathioprine. Cyclosporin works to reduce inflammation in the body by targeting the immune system. You may have started cyclosporin treatment via a drip inserted into a vein in your arm in hospital.

### How do I take it?

Cyclosporin can be taken orally or via drip inserted into the vein in hospital. Cyclosporin capsules should be taken twice a day, 12 hours apart. Capsules should be swallowed whole with a glass of water. Your gastroenterologist will determine which preparation and dose is most appropriate for you based on your weight and severity of your disease. You may be required to take cyclosporin for several months.

### What if I forget a dose?

If you are taking cyclosporine capsules and you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If your next dose is due in the next 6 hours skip the dose and continue taking your cyclosporine as normal. Do not double up on the dose.

### Can I take other medications?

Cyclosporin can be taken with other medicines but there are some medications that can interact with it. It is very important you tell your doctor about any medicines you are taking. This includes over-the-counter medicines, patches, eye drops, and herbal or alternative therapies.

If you are planning to have any vaccinations you should discuss this with your gastroenterologist, GP or IBD nurse. "Live" vaccines should be avoided while on cyclosporin.

### Routine monitoring and follow up

When starting on cyclosporin you will need weekly blood tests to check for drug levels, immune suppression and kidney dysfunction. You will also need frequent check-ups with your gastroenterologist. If your blood tests are stable after several weeks you will continue to have routine bloods tests 2 – 4 weekly and regular check-up appointments. If you become unwell or your blood tests are abnormal, you may require more frequent monitoring or have your dose of cyclosporin adjusted.

***It is very important that you have regular blood tests and check-ups with your doctor. It is unsafe to take cyclosporin without having these done.***

### What are the side effects?

Cyclosporin is well tolerated by most people. Many of the side effects that can occur stop after your dose of cyclosporin is reduced.

<i>Common side effects:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High blood pressure</li> <li>• Kidney dysfunction</li> <li>• High cholesterol</li> <li>• Nausea</li> <li>• Abdominal discomfort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Lowered immune system</li> <li>• Increased risk of infection</li> <li>• Increased hair growth</li> <li>• Muscle cramps and aches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tremor</li> <li>• Numbness</li> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> </ul>
<i>Uncommon but important side effects:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• indigestion</li> <li>• Chest pain</li> <li>• Irregular heart rate</li> <li>• dizziness</li> <li>• Irregular menstrual periods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liver inflammation</li> <li>• Vomiting</li> <li>• Diarrhoea</li> <li>• Flushing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gingivitis</li> <li>• acne,</li> <li>• skin rash</li> <li>• itchiness</li> </ul>
<i>Very rare side effects:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Insomnia</li> <li>• Severe allergic reaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convulsions</li> <li>• Confusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lymphoma</li> <li>• Skin cancer</li> </ul>

## Pregnancy and Cyclosporin

As with any medication, women of childbearing age should take special care when taking cyclosporin. If you are pregnant or are planning a pregnancy, please inform your doctor so they can discuss treatment options with you. Premature births and low birth weight has been associated with pregnant patients taking cyclosporin. Do not stop your medication until you have discussed your treatment options with your gastroenterologist. Breastfeeding should be avoided while taking cyclosporin.

## What do I do if I feel unwell?

Cyclosporin can lower your immune system making you more prone to infections. If you develop a chest infection, you should visit your GP who may prescribe a course of antibiotics to help you recover more quickly. It is important to report the following symptoms to your gastroenterologist, GP or IBD nurse. You may require a blood test or your dose of cyclosporin adjusted:

- High temperature and chills
- Persistent sore throat
- Skin rash
- Generally feeling unwell or vomiting
- Unexpected bruising or bleeding
- Severe abdominal pain

## 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).