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## Treatment Information

### Anti TNF $\alpha$ therapy (biologic therapy)

#### What are anti-TNF $\alpha$ drugs?

In people with rheumatoid arthritis, a protein called Tumour Necrosing Factor (TNF) is present in the blood and joints in excessive amounts, where it increases inflammation. Anti-TNF $\alpha$  drugs block the action of TNF and so can reduce inflammation. They are also effective in reducing or stopping joint damage progression.

A full review of your medical history will be taken prior to starting your medication to ensure that anti-TNF $\alpha$  is appropriate for your medical condition.

#### How are they administered?

Some of the Anti-TNF $\alpha$  drugs are given by a subcutaneous injection (an injection under the skin, like insulin injections for diabetes). You will be taught how to administer this yourself. Another way of giving anti-TNF $\alpha$  drugs is by intravenous injection (that is through a drip into a vein). You will need to go to the hospital each time you have an infusion.

#### How long will the anti-TNF $\alpha$ drug take to work?

If you respond to the drug you will probably feel better in 2-12 weeks. If you do not respond to the drug in 3 – 6 months, then the anti-TNF $\alpha$  drug will be stopped, your disease reassessed, and a decision will be made as to whether you should try a different drug.

#### Alert Card

All patients on anti-TNF $\alpha$  must always carry an alert card with them and this card should be shown to any medical person you consult.

#### What do I do if I develop an infection?

People with inflammatory arthritis e.g. rheumatoid arthritis are known to have an increased risk of infection. Anti-TNF $\alpha$  treatments have a powerful effect on the immune system and may reduce the body's ability to fight infection. **IT IS VERY IMPORTANT** that you report any sign of infection to your GP or the rheumatology clinic and stop the medication immediately. The telephone advice line number is below. Out of hours phone your GP or go to casualty. If in doubt, **DO NOT HAVE YOUR INJECTION.**

Possible signs of infection are:

- Fever – feeling hot / cold / shivery (check your temperature with a thermometer)
- Chesty cough
- Sore throat
- Burning or stinging when you pass water
- Diarrhoea / vomiting

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- Skin lesions e.g. boils, abscesses, ulcers
- Tooth ache

### **How can I reduce the risk of infection?**

You may be more at risk of food-borne infections such as salmonella and listeria, which may result in food poisoning and other serious illness. You can lessen this risk by avoiding foods such as:

- Raw eggs or products made from raw eggs
- Unpasteurised milk
- Mould-ripened soft cheeses (e.g. Brie and Camembert)
- Undercooked meat and poultry
- All types of pâté

You should also wash all raw fruit and vegetables and ensure chilled meals are thoroughly cooked before eating.

### **Can I take other drugs while on anti-TNF $\alpha$ ?**

Anti-TNF $\alpha$  treatments may be given alongside other treatments for your arthritis. Live vaccines such as polio or yellow fever should not be given with anti-TNF $\alpha$  treatments; but you should arrange to have the pneumococcal vaccine before you start treatment.

### **Is it safe to become pregnant whilst on anti-TNF $\alpha$ ?**

Pregnancy should be avoided while on anti-TNF treatments. If you are male or female, and planning to have children, please discuss this with your rheumatologist.

### **What do I do if I need surgery while having treatment?**

If you require an operation you will need to temporarily discontinue the treatment; but you must consult your rheumatology practitioner beforehand.

## Contact Details

If you have any further questions or need advice about your treatment phone the Rheumatology Advice line on

**01202 442849.**

[www.poole.nhs.uk/our\\_services/rheumatology.asp](http://www.poole.nhs.uk/our_services/rheumatology.asp)

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For further health-related information, please contact:

**The Health Information & Resource Centre**

Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Longfleet Road

Poole

BH15 2JB

Telephone: (01202) 448003

Rheumatology Practitioners

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**We can supply this information in larger print, on audiotape, or have it translated for you. A member of staff will be happy to discuss this with you. Please call PALS on 01202 448499 or the Health Information Centre on 01202 448003 for further advice**