

Starting Advanced Therapies

Rheumatology Outpatients Service

This leaflet explains more about starting Biologics and the application process before starting treatment, it supplements the information that you have been given by your clinician.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

Checklist for what happens next:

- You will have a blood test and chest x-ray.
- Review your vaccines and arrange with your GP four weeks before treatment if needed.
- The Biologics Coordinator will put in a funding application
- If you are going to receive injections or tablets:
- Once funding is in place, we will issue your prescription and send it to the Homecare company. In 4-6 weeks, they will contact you to arrange a delivery time that is convenient to you.
- If injecting a Homecare nurse will contact, you to arrange training.
- 12 weeks after starting your medication you will have an appointment with the Biologics nurse to assess how you are getting on, to renew the funding, you will then have an annual appointment with the Biologics nurse.
- Repeat prescriptions are automatically sent to us from the Homecare company if you have not heard from the Homecare company two weeks before you are due to run out of medication please contact the Biologics Coordinator.

If you are receiving an infusion:

- A pre-infusion appointment will be made.

What is a Biologic?

Biologics are medications that block specific inflammatory proteins made by your immune system. They can come as injections, tablets, or an infusion. They help to reduce the joint damage inflammation and stiffness in your body, they are not painkillers.

What does it cost?

Biologics are extremely expensive medications; funding must be applied for and approved from your local commissioners. Due to this expense, you will be expected to attend appointments for reassessment and bloods with the Biologics nurse. Failure to attend these appointments will result in your prescription being stopped.

How will I receive my medication?

If you are receiving tablets or injections, you will receive your medication via a private Homecare company, if self-injecting you will also receive a nurse visit who will teach you how to inject and dispose of your waste correctly in a sharps bin which they will replace and dispose of at every delivery.

If you are receiving an infusion this will be given at the hospital, you will be contacted by the infusion suite to arrange this.

How long do they take to work?

Some people notice a difference within weeks, but it often takes between 3 to 6 months for maximum benefit to be

felt. It is important that you keep taking this medication even if you feel it isn't working at first.

What common side effects may occur?

Most patients tolerate these new medications well however if self-injecting you may experience the following:

- Injection site reaction where the skin around the injection site becomes red, swollen, and painful. This can be helped by using a cold compress, an antihistamine and good injection technique. If you feel you would like extra training or support, please get in touch.
- You may experience more viral infections e.g. coughs and colds, as these do not require antibiotics you will not need to stop your biologic.
- If you are taking Etanercept and are a diabetic this may cause Low blood sugars or hypos.

When do I need to seek medical advice?

Taking biologics makes you more susceptible to infections as they work against the immune system, some of the ways infections can present is:

- Feeling generally unwell, fever, chills, sweats.
- Pain and more frequency passing urine (UTI).
- Shingles/Chicken pox or if you come into contact with someone who has these.
- If you contract COVID19 contact your GP immediately as you may be eligible for medication to
- If you have a persistent/productive cough, fever, weight loss or night sweats.

Other symptoms to report include:

- Injection site reactions.
- Pins and needles or difficulty with movements.
- Increased muscle ache, joint swelling or pain.
- Changes to your mood, speech, or vision.

If you experience symptoms occur, you must:

- Stop your biologic, and contact your GP
- If you are given a course of antibiotics, stop your biologic, complete the course of antibiotics, and restart your biologic provided your infection has cleared.
- You do not need to stop your biologic due to an injection site reaction.

How do I prevent infections?

- Maintain good standards of food and personal hygiene, when preparing, handling, and storing food.
- Ensure you have good dental hygiene and regular dental check-ups.
- Stop smoking, smoking drives inflammatory disease and prevents the biologic working, smoking also increases the risk of heart disease.

Surgery advice

You will need to stop your biologic before and after having surgery this also includes dental surgery. Contact us as soon as you know that you will be having surgery so that we can advise you as to when to stop your medication.

Useful sources of information

Versus Arthritis www.versusarthritis.org

NRAS www.nras.org.uk

NASS www.nass.co.uk

Lupus Uk www.lupusuk.org.uk

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about starting a biologic or the application process, please contact us:

Diane Hill – Biologics Coordinator

0208 266 6801

Anti-TNF.enquiries@stgeorges.nhs.uk

Christina Oviawe Biologics Nurse

0208 266 6807

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

Accessible

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk).

The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence



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