

# Tacrolimus

**Information for patients about using the drug  
Tacrolimus.**

Your consultant has recommended you start treatment with tacrolimus. This leaflet has been developed to provide you with additional information and will help to answer any questions you may have.

## **What is tacrolimus used for?**

Tacrolimus is used to treat a number of lung conditions, including severe asthma and Interstitial Lung Disease.

## **What is tacrolimus and how is it used?**

Tacrolimus works by dampening down the underlying disease process to limit or prevent tissue damage and disability, rather than having an immediate effect on symptoms. Your doctor may prescribe tacrolimus if you are on steroid treatment in order to try and reduce your steroid dose.

It may be up to 12 weeks before the tacrolimus starts to work. Unless you have severe side-effects it is important to continue taking it even if:

- You do not notice any changes in your symptoms.
- Your symptoms improve (as this will help to keep the condition under control).

The tacrolimus may need to be used with caution or reduced doses if you have:

- Mild to moderate kidney or liver problems.
- Bone marrow problems.
- Heart problems such as QT prolongation or high blood pressure not controlled by medications.

## **When and how do I take tacrolimus?**

Tacrolimus comes as a capsule, and is usually taken TWICE daily with a full glass of water. The dose should be taken on an empty stomach, preferably at least 1 hour BEFORE or 2-3 hours AFTER having food.

Your doctor, pharmacist or nurse will advise you on the dose you should take, which will depend on your blood results.

## **Possible risks and side effects**

As with all medications, tacrolimus may cause side effects. Common adverse effects include feeling sick (nauseous), diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, headache, or visual disturbances.

It can also affect your blood counts, your kidneys and your liver, so you will need to have blood tests before starting tacrolimus and at regular intervals during treatment.

You will be provided with a monitoring booklet where your doctor or pharmacist will document your medication, dose and blood results. You should bring the booklet to your GP and hospital appointments. Tacrolimus may also affect your heart rate and blood pressure and this will also be monitored before you start treatment and at regular intervals.

As tacrolimus affects the immune system, it can make you more likely to develop infections. You should tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse specialist straight away if you develop any of the following after starting tacrolimus:

- a sore throat, fever or any other signs of infection
- shortness of breath
- unexplained bruising or bleeding
- yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice)
- any other new symptoms or anything else that concerns you.

You should also see your doctor if you develop chickenpox or shingles or come into contact with someone who has chickenpox or shingles. These infections can be severe in people on tacrolimus. You may need antiviral treatment, and you may be advised to stop taking tacrolimus until you're better.

There may be an increased risk of certain types of cancer with tacrolimus. Some of these may affect the skin and the use of sunscreens is advised. You should discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist if you have any concerns.

There are different brands of tacrolimus available. Your doctor will try and keep you on the same brand and this will be documented in your booklet.

## Reducing the risk of infection

Try to avoid close contact with people with severe active infections.

For advice on avoiding infection from food, visit:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/foodpoisoning/pages/prevention.aspx>

## Taking other medicines

Some medicines can interact with tacrolimus. Always check before starting any new medications, and remember to mention you are on tacrolimus if you are treated by anyone other than your usual respiratory team.

- Avoid eating unpasteurised food and drinking grapefruit juice.
- You should only take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) on the advice of your GP or respiratory clinician.
- Don't take over-the-counter preparations or **herbal remedies** without discussing this first with your healthcare team. Herbal remedies like St. John's wort interact with tacrolimus.
- Some **antifungals and antibiotics** can interact with tacrolimus – for example, fluconazole and erythromycin should not be taken with tacrolimus. If you have an infection that requires antibiotics you may need to stop your tacrolimus until you are better and off antibiotics.
- **Anti-epileptic medication** (phenytoin, carbamazepine) levels could be reduced by tacrolimus.

If you are on other medications which could interact with tacrolimus (e.g. fluconazole, erythromycin) then your doctor may suggest another treatment or a different dose either of the tacrolimus or of your other medication.

## Vaccinations

You should have the pneumococcal vaccine (which gives protection against the commonest cause of pneumonia) and annual flu vaccines.

Whilst taking tacrolimus you should avoid live vaccines such as yellow fever. If you're offered the shingles vaccination you should check with your respiratory team first as you may be able to have it if you are on low-dose tacrolimus.

## Alcohol

You should only drink alcohol in small amounts as both the alcohol and tacrolimus can affect your liver. It is also strongly recommended to have alcohol free days without 'saving units up' to drink all in one go. If you are concerned you should discuss your alcohol intake with your respiratory team.

Do not drive or use any tools or machines if you feel dizzy or sleepy, or have problems seeing clearly after taking tacrolimus. If you are also drinking alcohol, these effects could be worse.

## Pregnancy and breastfeeding

If you are planning a family or become pregnant while taking tacrolimus, you should discuss this with your doctor as soon as possible. They may need to make adjustments to your medications to protect your baby. Tacrolimus may also affect sperm count and motility. You should talk to your respiratory clinician about fertility.

Tacrolimus may pass into the breast milk and the effects on the baby are uncertain so you shouldn't breastfeed whilst taking tacrolimus.

## Contact details

### Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)

**e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)

**e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language and Accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

**t:** 020 7188 8815    **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 111

**NHS Choices** – Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

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