

# Tacrolimus

Information about using the drug Tacrolimus.

This leaflet will answer some of the questions you may have about tacrolimus. You can discuss the benefits and risks of taking tacrolimus with your healthcare professionals before you start treatment, so you can make an informed decision.

## What tacrolimus is used for

Tacrolimus is used to treat a number of conditions, including severe asthma and interstitial lung disease.

## What tacrolimus is and how it is used

Tacrolimus works by reducing the activity of your body's immune system. It slows down how active your condition is, rather than just treating how its symptoms affect you.

When your immune system is working properly, it protects you by fighting off infection and illness. However, in inflammatory conditions, your immune system may attack parts of your body by mistake, such as your lungs.

Tacrolimus does not work immediately. It may be up to 4 months before you notice any benefit.

## When and how to take tacrolimus

Tacrolimus is given as a capsule. Usually you will be advised to take a dose **twice** a day with a full glass of water. The dose should be taken whole (not crushed or chewed) on an empty stomach, preferably at least 1 hour **before** or 2-3 hours **after** having food.

The amount you take will depend on your blood test results. There are different brands of tacrolimus available and it is important to take the same brand.

It is important to keep taking tacrolimus even if it does not seem to be working at first. It is also important to keep taking it when your symptoms start to improve, as this will help control your condition.

If you have missed a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within 6 hours of your usual time. If you have missed a capsule, do not take any more than your regular dose to make up for it.

If you think you have taken too much tacrolimus, call your specialist team or the NHS helpline, **t: 111**.

## **Possible risks and side effects**

Tacrolimus can cause a number of side effects, including:

- nausea (feeling sick)
- diarrhoea
- abdominal cramps
- headache
- visual disturbance

While you are taking tacrolimus, contact your specialist team straight away if you start experiencing any new symptoms or anything that concerns you. Let them know immediately if you have:

- a sore throat, fever, flu-like symptoms
- new, or worsening, constant cough or shortness of breath
- unexplained bruising or bleeding
- yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice)
- the sensation that your heart is beating unusually.

If any of your symptoms are severe, your doctor may advise you to stop taking tacrolimus. You should see your doctor as soon as possible if you come into contact with anyone with shingles or chickenpox, or if you get them yourself. These infections can affect you badly if you are taking tacrolimus. You may need antiviral treatment, and your tacrolimus may be stopped until you are better.

Although it is rare, there is a slightly increased risk of certain types of cancer, such as skin cancer, in people taking tacrolimus. Skin cancers can often be treated successfully when diagnosed early. Make sure you use sunscreen and regularly check your skin for any new spots or changes to your freckles or moles.

Tacrolimus can affect your blood count and can sometimes cause liver or kidney problems. Tacrolimus can also affect your blood sugar, heart rate and blood pressure. Your doctor or pharmacist will arrange for you to have a blood test, heart rate and blood pressure monitoring before you start treatment, and regularly while you are taking tacrolimus.

## **Reducing the risk of infection**

Try to avoid close contact with people you know have an infection. Wash your hands regularly and carry a small bottle of antibacterial hand gel. Keep your mouth clean by brushing your teeth regularly. Stop smoking if you are a smoker. Make sure your food is stored and prepared properly. Try to keep your house clean and hygienic, especially the kitchen, bathroom and toilet.

## Taking other medicines

Tacrolimus may be prescribed along with other drugs to treat your condition. Some drugs can interact with tacrolimus. Before you start any new medication, it's always a good idea to talk to your doctor or pharmacist first to make sure the treatments can be taken together.

You can continue to take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, if needed, unless your doctor or pharmacist advises otherwise.

However, you should avoid eating unpasteurised food and drinking grapefruit juice. You should not take over-the-counter preparations or **herbal remedies** without discussing them with your specialist team.

You should tell any other healthcare professionals treating you, such as doctors, pharmacists, dentists or nurses, that you're taking tacrolimus.

## Vaccinations

If you are taking tacrolimus you should avoid live vaccines, such as yellow fever. However, in certain situations a live vaccine may be necessary, so speak to your pharmacist or doctor about this for advice.

You should get the pneumococcal vaccine to protect you against the most common cause of pneumonia, and have your yearly flu vaccines. These are both safe to have while you're being treated with tacrolimus.

## **Alcohol**

Tacrolimus and alcohol can both affect your liver, so you should only drink alcohol in small amounts.

Government guidelines say men and women should have no more than 14 units of alcohol a week, and that you should spread these through the week rather than having them all in one go.

You should 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.

Current guidelines say that tacrolimus can be taken if you are trying for a baby and even when pregnant or breastfeeding. Men are also fine to continue taking it when trying for a baby.

## **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, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [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**

This service 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      **w:** [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk)

## **NHS website**

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.

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

## **Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust**

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

**t:** 0800 731 0319   **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)

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

### **Was this leaflet useful?**

We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you. Fill in our online form, **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets), or **e:** [patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk)

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