Rifampicin and clindamycin for hidradenitis suppurativa

This leaflet aims to answer any questions you may have about taking rifampicin and clindamycin for the treatment of hidradenitis suppurativa (HS). If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

Please read this leaflet along with the manufacturers’ leaflets for rifampicin and clindamycin, which will be provided with your medicines. Copies of these leaflets are also available to access from www.emc.medicines.org.uk (Please be aware that the manufacturers’ leaflets may not mention HS – see paragraph below, Taking an unlicensed medicine.)

What are rifampicin and clindamycin?
Rifampicin and clindamycin are both antibiotics, which work by killing bacteria that can cause infections. They can be used in combination with each other or other antibiotics, to treat or prevent a number of different infections in people who are at risk of developing these. They are also thought to reduce inflammation. Rifampicin is never recommended to be used alone, so it is important that they are taken together.

The combination of rifampicin and clindamycin can be effective in some cases of HS by reducing inflammation and preventing infections from occurring. Your doctor feels that you would benefit from this treatment and has recommended it for you.

Taking an unlicensed medicine
Rifampicin and clindamycin are licensed in the UK for the treatment of a number of infections. However, their use in the treatment of HS, outside the setting of a flare-up triggered by infection, is ‘unlicensed’. Your doctor will discuss with you why they are recommending these antibiotics, so please ask them if you have any questions. The leaflet, Unlicensed medicines – a guide for patients, provides more information. If you would like a copy, please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Alternatively, you can call the Pharmacy Medicines Helpline – contact details are at the end of this leaflet.

How do I take rifampicin and clindamycin?
- Read the manufacturers’ printed information leaflets supplied with the medicines before you start treatment.
- Take your medicines exactly as directed by your doctor. Both rifampicin and clindamycin are usually taken twice a day when used in the treatment of HS.
- Do not stop taking the rifampicin or clindamycin without speaking to your doctor first, or until your course is complete. Rifampicin must be taken on an empty stomach (at least half to one hour before food, or at least two hours after food). Clindamycin can be taken before or after food.
- Clindamycin must be swallowed whole with a full glass of water.
- Try to take the medicines at the same time each day to avoid missing any doses.
What should I do if I forget to take the medicine?
Take the missed dose as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and return to your normal dosing schedule. Do NOT take a double dose under any circumstances.

Are there any side effects?
The manufacturers' information leaflets that come with the medicines will list all known side effects associated with rifampicin and clindamycin – please refer to these for further information. Some of the more important or common side effects are discussed below.

**IMPORTANT - You MUST seek urgent medical attention if you suffer from any of the following:**
- Diarrhoea which is severe, prolonged or bloody. This may be a sign of bowel inflammation (pseudomembranous colitis), which can occur following treatment with antibiotics. If this happens, you must stop taking both the clindamycin and rifampicin immediately.
- Wheezeiness, difficulty in breathing, swelling of eyelids, face or lips, rash or itching (especially affecting the whole body). These may be signs of a severe allergic reaction.
- A fever with yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes (jaundice), feeling or being sick, feeling tired and generally unwell, and/or loss of appetite. These may be signs of liver problems.
- Blistering and peeling of large areas of skin, fever, cough, feeling unwell and swelling of the gums, tongue or lips. This may a sign of a serious skin condition.
- Flu-like symptoms including chills, fever, headaches, dizziness and bone pain, shortness of breath and malaise. This may be ‘flu syndrome’ which can be caused by rifampicin.
- Bleeding or easy bruising, red spots under the skin, black stools, fever, sore throat, mouth ulcers or recurrent infections. This may be a sign of a serious blood condition.

Some of the more common side effects experienced by people who take these medicines include:

**Clindamycin**
- Stomach ache or cramps
- Unpleasant taste in the mouth
- Skin dryness or irritation

**Rifampicin**
- Reddish coloration of the urine, sweat, sputum (phlegm) and tears. Soft contact lenses may be permanently stained. Do not be alarmed, this is harmless. This will stop when the rifampicin is stopped. Consider wearing glasses instead of contact lenses.
- Headache
- Flushing and mild rash

It is important to know that if you develop severe side effects, you must stop taking BOTH medicines.

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to these medicines, or you have any concerns about side effects, please speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.
Will I need to be monitored?
We will need to check that these medicines are not causing any serious side effects and you will therefore need to have blood tests at regular intervals. Your kidney function, liver function and full blood counts will be measured every 4 to 6 weeks.

If you have diabetes, you may need to monitor your blood glucose levels more frequently as your diabetes may be harder to control. Your doctor will be able to advise you about this.

How long will I need to take these medicines for?
You will take the clindamycin and rifampicin for three months and you will then be reviewed in clinic.

Is there anything else I need to know?
Both rifampicin and clindamycin may interact with other medicines. Please tell the doctor who is prescribing them for you about any other medicines you are taking, including herbal or over-the-counter medicines. If you feel concerned, you may also wish to discuss them with your pharmacist.

Rifampicin reduces the effectiveness of different types of hormonal contraception. If you are currently using hormonal contraception, including the contraceptive pill, please discuss this with your doctor. You will need to switch to a different contraceptive method that is not affected by your treatment, and this will need to be continued throughout your treatment and for four weeks after stopping treatment.

If you are pregnant, think you may be pregnant, or are planning on becoming pregnant, please speak to your doctor before taking rifampicin or clindamycin.

If you are breastfeeding, small amounts of both rifampicin and clindamycin may pass into the breast milk. Please speak to your doctor before breastfeeding.

How do I get a repeat prescription?
Your dermatologist will give you a prescription at your dermatology outpatient appointment. If you are stable and are not having any problems with your medications, your GP may be able to prescribe them for you – please check at your surgery. Either way, you will continue to be followed up regularly at the hospital.
Useful sources of information

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

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

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

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    **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership