Receiving biologic medication for inflammatory arthritis

This leaflet gives you information about what needs to happen before you can start taking biologic medication for your inflammatory arthritis. A separate information leaflet containing more information about the specific drug that you will be given is available – please ask your nurse or doctor for a copy if you do not have one.

What is biologic medication?

A biologic medicine is a medicine whose active substance is made by or derived from a living organism. A number of biologic medicines that target different elements of the body’s inflammatory system are used in the treatment of inflammatory arthritis. The aim of the treatment is to reduce inflammation and pain.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS. All NHS organisations must follow this guidance when prescribing biologic medication for patients with inflammatory arthritis. Your rheumatologist will have spoken to you about the treatment options available to you and you will have agreed to treatment with biologic medications. A specialist nurse working in rheumatology will explain how to use the medicine and how you will obtain further supplies.

Before you can receive biologic medication

1. You may need additional tests before starting treatment, for example a chest x-ray or blood tests.

2. A referral form stating that you meet the NICE eligibility criteria for treatment with biologic medications will be completed by your doctor.

3. The referral form is checked by nursing staff before being passed on to the pharmacy team.

4. The pharmacist will also check the referral form to confirm that the NICE criteria have been met. The pharmacist will process the prescription so you can receive your treatment at home or in the clinic.

5. You will be contacted by a nurse when the paperwork has been completed and the medicine is available.

Please note that this process can take up to four weeks.
For patients to be treated with adalimumab (Humira®), etanercept (Enbrel®) or certolizumab (Cimzia®)

- A pharmacy specialising in treatments at home will deliver the medication to you.
- We will ask you for your permission before passing on your details to them.
- They will contact you to arrange delivery and an adult (over 18) will need to be at home to sign for the drug.
- Once you have received your medication, you should contact the nursing team on 020 7188 5896 to arrange an appointment where you can learn how to self-administer your medication.

For patients to be treated with golimumab (Simponi®)

- A pharmacy specialising in treatments at home will deliver the medication to you.
- We will ask you for your permission before passing on your details to them.
- They will contact you to arrange delivery and an adult (over 18) will need to be at home to sign for the drug.
- Once you have received your medication, a nurse from the pharmacy specialising in treatments at home will call you to arrange an appointment where you can learn how to self-administer your medication.

For patients to be treated with infliximab (Remicade®)

This medication is administered as an infusion into a vein and needs to be given in hospital. You will be contacted by the nurse to arrange your first appointment for this infusion. You will need to allow up to four hours for this treatment. Your next infusion will be two weeks after this, then four weeks after the second dose, and then every eight weeks.

For patients to be treated with abatacept (Orencia®)

This medication is administered as an infusion into a vein and needs to be given in hospital. You will be contacted by the nurse to arrange your first appointment for this infusion. You will need to allow up to two hours for this treatment. Your second infusion will be two weeks after this, then two weeks after the second dose, and then every four weeks.

For patients to be treated with tocilizumab (RoActemra®)

This medication is administered as an infusion into a vein and needs to be given in hospital. You will be contacted by the nurse to arrange the appointments for this infusion. You will need to allow up to two hours for this treatment. This infusion is given every four weeks.

For patients to be treated with rituximab (MabThera®)

This medication is administered as an infusion into a vein and needs to be given in hospital. You will be contacted by the nurse to arrange the appointments for the infusion – you will have two infusions two weeks apart. You should allow up to eight hours for each infusion and we therefore advise you to bring snacks and, if you wish, something to read with you.

Monitoring your progress

You will be seen by the rheumatologist or nurse three months after starting treatment in the outpatient clinic where your response to the biologic medication will be checked.
You should have a blood test at least every three months but you may need these more frequently if you are also taking other medication – the nurse or doctor will discuss this with you.

If you experience any adverse effects to your treatment (for example injection site redness, rash, or signs of infection such as fever or swelling of the injection site), please report this to the nursing team or your rheumatologist.

If there has been no significant improvement in your condition after six months, the medication may not be right for you and it may be stopped. Your rheumatologist will discuss the treatment options with you if the treatment is not effective.

**Patients taking adalimumab (Humira®), etanercept (Enbrel®), certolizumab (Cimzia®) or golimumab (Simponi®)**

The rheumatology department will provide all the prescriptions for these medications and send them to the pharmacy specialising in treatments at home. They will supply you with a sharps bin and replace this when necessary.

Please note that if you do not attend your clinic appointments or have regular blood tests, we will not be able to issue your prescriptions. We will send you a letter informing you of this.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

**Storage of the injections:**

- **Please ensure that you store medicines out of the reach of children.**
- The injections need to be stored in the fridge between 2 and 8°C in their original packaging.
- You must ensure that your fridge is in working order and maintained at the correct temperature.
- If you have any problems with your fridge, you should contact the rheumatology department or the company who delivered your medication.
- Do not use the pen or syringe if:
  - the expiry date has passed
  - the pen or syringe is frozen
  - it has been left in direct sunlight
  - it is cloudy or discoloured, or has flakes or particles in it.

**Useful sources of information**

Arthritis Research UK  
www.arthritisresearchuk.org

National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society  
www.nras.org.uk

National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society  
www.nass.co.uk

**Appointments at King's**

We have teamed up with King’s College Hospital in a partnership known as King’s Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at King’s. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.
Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns about the medication, please contact the rheumatology department on **020 7188 5896** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). Out of hours, please contact your GP or NHS Direct on 0845 4647, or go to your local Accident & Emergency (A&E) department.

Pharmacy medicines helpline
For information about any medicines that you have been prescribed at Guy’s and St Thomas’ hospitals, you can speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.
**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust’s services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:
**t:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas’  
**t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy’s  
**e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)
For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas’ Hospital.
**t:** 020 7188 3416

Language support services
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.
**t:** 020 7188 8815  
**fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS Direct
Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.
**t:** 0845 4647  
**w:** www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future
Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years. To join:
**t:** 0848 143 4017  
**e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk  
**w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk