

Infliximab - Frequently Asked Questions

Chemotherapy, Immunotherapy,
and Supportive Medicines

A guide for patients and carers

What if I decide not to have an anti-TNF agent?

The team looking after you feels that this is the best treatment option to manage your symptoms. It is possible that your symptoms will continue to worsen unless an alternative drug is suitable for you.

Can I have immunisations after having Infliximab?

Flu vaccinations are safe following Infliximab as they are not a live vaccination but you should avoid immunisations with 'live' vaccines such as polio, BCG and MMR.

Can I drink alcohol after receiving Infliximab treatment?

There is no reason to avoid alcohol (in moderation, as per government guidelines). For further information regarding Infliximab, please contact your specialist team.

How we produce our information

All of our leaflets are produced by staff at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and this information is not sponsored or influenced in any way. Every effort is made to ensure that the information included in this leaflet is accurate and complete and we hope that it will add to any professional advice you have had. All our leaflets are evidence based where appropriate and they are regularly reviewed and updated. If you are concerned about your health in any way, you should consult your healthcare team.

We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. All of our information is in line with accepted national or international guidelines where possible. Where no guidelines exist, we rely on other reliable sources such as systematic reviews, published clinical trials data or a consensus review of experts. We also use medical textbooks, journals and government publications.

References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 556 5570.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 556 5570.

If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 556 5203.

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What is Infliximab?

Infliximab is used to treat colitis by reducing inflammation of the bowel. A protein called TNF-alpha, which is important in the inflammatory process, is blocked by Infliximab. Therefore these drugs are referred to as anti-TNF agents.

How is Infliximab given?

Infliximab is given as an infusion into a vein. It is infused over 2 hours and you will need to be observed for approximately 2 hours after the infusion has finished. This is to monitor for side effects of the medication.

You will be given premedication to reduce potential side effects.

How often do you need Infliximab?

Every person is different, therefore your symptoms will be monitored after the first infusion. If needed, you will receive further infusions approximately 2 and 6 weeks later.

Treatment can continue long term but most importantly your symptoms will be monitored after each infusion.

How long will the Infliximab infusion take to work?

The response to this treatment varies. Most patient symptoms improve within 2 to 6 weeks. Some patients report they feel better within a few days.

Do you need any investigations before having an Infliximab infusion?

Yes – you will need to have a chest X-ray (if you have not had a recent chest x-ray or chest CT Scan). This is to ensure that you do not have (or have ever had) tuberculosis (TB), as anti-TNF agents can, in some cases, re-activate past TB. We will also take some blood tests which will also check for underlying infections.

What are the benefits of having an Infliximab infusion?

Anti-TNF agents are used to treat inflammation of the bowel and keep it under control when other treatments have not been able to manage symptoms.

What side effects can I expect from Infliximab?

Side effects are uncommon (fewer than 1 in 10 people) and are usually mild. Any side effects are most likely to occur during the infusion or in the few days afterwards.

Side effects include:

- Cold and flu-like symptoms (runny nose, shivering and headaches)
- Dizziness
- Flushing or rashes
- Swelling of hands, feet, lips or mouth

- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Abdominal pain

In rare cases, patients may have an allergic reaction. If this occurs the infusion will be stopped and medical attention will be sought. The infusion may be restarted at a slower rate depending on symptoms.

Anti-TNF agents work by suppressing the immune system therefore your risk of infection are increased. If you are unwell on the day of your scheduled Infliximab infusion it is important that you tell the team, as it may be necessary to delay treatment.

If you experience any side effects after discharge, you can contact the The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre Hotline on 0800 169 5555 (available 24/7), where a trained nurse will carry out a telephone assessment and advise the best course of action.

Are there alternative treatments available?

This should be discussed with your specialist team. For some patients it may be possible to consider a treatment called Vedolizumab.

