

Generic Name: Leflunonide

Brand Name: Arava



How it works:

- Leflunomide is a disease modifying anti-rheumatic drug (DMARD).
- It reduces the symptoms of inflammation and slows down the disease process and damage to joints in people with rheumatoid and psoriatic arthritis.

How quickly it works:

- Benefits usually occur within 4 to 8 weeks.

How to take:

- Tablets are available in 10 or 20 mg.
- The usual dose is 10 or 20 mg/day.
- Take preferably at the same time each day.
- May be taken with or without food.



If you forget to take your medication

- take it as soon as you remember, unless it is nearly time for your next dose. Do not double-up on the next dose to make up for a missed dose.

**Monitoring:
Lab Tests:**



- Do blood tests (CBC, platelets, AST, ALT, albumin & ESR) every 4 weeks to monitor benefit of therapy & for side effects
- Once a stable dosage of leflunomide is established, and your inflammation is under control, the blood tests may be reduced to every 6-8 weeks.

Blood Pressure:

Have B.P. checked monthly for 6 months.



Side Effects:

Possible side effects:

- Diarrhea (27%)
- Nausea (13%)
- High liver enzymes (10%)
- Hair loss (9%)
- Rash (12%)
- Upper respiratory infections (21%)
- Increased blood pressure (10%)
- Sores in mouth or nose (6%)

Potentially serious side effects:

- Low white blood cell counts (3%)
- Major liver inflammation (<.01%)
- Rare, serious skin reaction (<1%)

Managing side effects:



Contact your doctor:

- if you develop any of the above symptoms. Side effects can occur anytime during treatment and are usually temporary.
- Side effects are often related to the dosage of leflunomide that you are taking. A decrease, or temporary withdrawal of leflunomide, and an increase in frequency of blood testing may be required.

Precautions:

Alcohol

- It is not recommended to drink alcohol during treatment with Leflunomide. Drinking alcohol while taking this medication may increase your risk of liver damage.

Pregnancy

- Leflunomide is not to be used by pregnant or nursing women or by women or men contemplating conception within 2 years. Leflunomide may cause birth defects or death to an unborn child.



- Both women and men should use reliable birth control during treatment with leflunomide.
- Women & men on leflunomide contemplating having a child, need to discontinue the drug and go through the drug elimination procedure and then wait another 3 months before conception occurs.

Drug elimination

- Levels of the drug may persist in the blood for 2 years after discontinuation. If necessary, the drug may be eliminated from your body over just 11 days by administration of another medication (cholestyramine). This is followed by 2 blood tests performed 14 days apart to assure a very low drug level in your body.

Vaccines:

- Do not take live vaccines while taking leflunomide.
- May have your flu or pneumovax vaccine as needed

Illness:



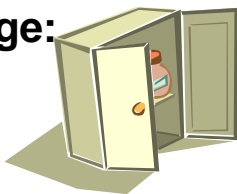
- If experiencing a serious infection (e.g. pneumonia) stop your leflunomide and consult your physician.

Surgery:

- Leflunomide may be stopped for a few days before and after your surgery by your surgeon, and should be restarted promptly thereafter
- Develop a plan with your doctor about medications & vitamin/mineral or herbal supplements when having upcoming surgery, dental work or other procedures.



Storage:



- Store at controlled room temperature 15 to 30°C (59-86°F).
- Do not keep in your bathroom as this is a warm, moist area.

General medication considerations:



1. Take your medication as instructed by your physician.

Work with your physician to determine how much medication you need.

Medications are started at low dosages and increased slowly to decrease risk of side effects. Taking more medication increases this risk.

Skipping doses will decrease the desired effect of the medication.

2. Keep a diary.

As a reminder, record when you take your medications & any reasons for changes or withdrawal of medications.

3. Keep a medication list in your wallet.

Record all medications, vitamin/mineral & herbal supplements you are presently taking & any allergies you may have.



Disclaimer:

This information does not replace medical advice. Specific questions about medications should be discussed with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Developed: April, 2002 by Jane Prince RN, BScN, Clinical Resource Nurse, Dr. Alice Klinkhoff, Dr. John Kelsall, Mary Pack Arthritis Program, Vancouver Arthritis Centre, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority
Revised: March, 2006