

**Generic Name: Rituximab**

**Brand Name: Rituxan**



**How it works:**

- Rituximab is a “biologic” medicine developed to treat the overactive immune system & inflammatory process in the person with moderate to severe Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA).
- The immune system is the body’s defense against attack from foreign invaders such as bacteria and virus infections. In people with RA, the body’s immune system mistakes certain normal cells in the body as foreign invaders. The immune cells get turned on and begin attacking healthy body tissues. This immune system process causes inflammation (swelling) of joints and other tissues, and will cause damage if not treated.
- Rituximab specifically targets B-cells, a type of white blood cell in the blood, from being turned on. Rituximab is a protein that binds to the surface of the B cells & destroys them.

**Why take it?**



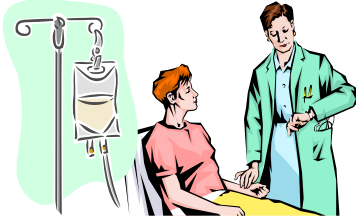
- Rituximab has been ordered by the doctor to help manage your arthritis. It is used after someone has tried 1 or 2 anti-TNF biologic medications to manage the arthritis. Rituximab is used alone or in combination with other medications to help
  - reduce joint pain
  - decrease length of morning stiffness
  - reduce the number of swollen & tender joints
  - decrease your level of fatigue (tiredness)
  - increase your ability to move joints & do daily activities
  - slow or even prevent damage to your joints.

**How quickly it works:**



- Improvement in your joints, your ability to move & energy level may take as long as 3 – 4 months after receiving Rituximab to occur.
- This improvement in symptoms may last up to 6 – 9 months.

## How to take:



- You will go to a clinic. A nurse will place a needle in a vein in your arm and you will receive an IV (intravenous infusion) over 4 ½ hours.
- The preparation, premedication, infusion & observation period after the infusion may take up to 6 – 8 hours in total.
- Rituximab infusions are done at:
  - Day 1 - initial infusion
  - Day 15 – second infusion
  - then the 2 doses are repeated in 6 to 12 months as needed to control inflammation (swelling) in the body.
- Dosage:
  - Each vial of rituximab contains 500 mg.
  - Each infusion of rituximab is 1000 mg
- Premedication:
  - Prior to your infusion you receive tylenol & benadryl pills.
  - Then you receive IV solumedrol (methylprednisolone), a steroid medication, given 30 minutes before the rituximab medication is started to help prevent possible reactions.
- Methotrexate or another DMARD (Disease Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drug) is also taken with rituximab to increase the effect of the drug, as well to decrease the risk of side effects.



## Develop a plan for having your infusions:

- Mark your infusion dates on a calendar ahead of time.
- Ensure you have transportation to the clinic.
- Ensure the medication is ordered a week prior.
- Wear comfortable clothing, bring lunch & a book.
- Contact the nurse if you have any concerns before the infusion.



## Monitoring:

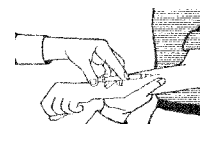
- Prior to starting rituximab, the following tests are done:



Physical Exam



Lab Tests



TB skin test



Chest X-ray

- All vaccinations should be done 4 weeks prior to starting



## Lab tests:



## Side Effects:

Rituximab.

- Do blood tests as ordered by your doctor every 3 months
  - CBC, platelets, AST, ALT, albumin, alk phos, creatinine, ESR/CRP , IgG, IgM, RF.
  - Hepatitis screening is done prior to starting Rituximab.

**Like all medicines that effect the immune system, rituximab can cause side effects, some of which may be serious.**

### Infusion reactions:

- some patients may react to the medication during or shortly after the first infusion. You may experience:
  - fever & chills
  - flushing, feeling weak or tired
  - headache
  - irritation or swelling of the throat or tongue
  - difficulty breathing, chest tightness or fast heartbeat
  - itchiness or rash
- If reactions occur, your symptoms will be treated immediately with medication as needed. Side effects can occur any time during treatment and are usually temporary.

### Possible side effects that generally occur within 24 hours after the first infusion:

- fever, chills & general weakness
- rash, hives or itchiness
- sore throat or cough
- headache
- sore muscles or joints
- abdominal pain or nausea



### Possible serious side effects:

- Infections
  - pneumonia
  - urinary tract infections
- Skin reactions: including painful sores, blistering, or peeling
- Chest pain or abnormal heart rhythms
- Decreased blood levels of white blood cells that help fight



## Managing Side Effects:



## Illness:

## Surgery:



## Precautions:



infection.

### Contact your doctor:

- if you develop any of the above signs or symptoms.

### Treat delayed allergic type reactions:

(flushing, itching, rash, hives or shortness of breath)

- Take Benadryl 25 – 50 mg every 4 to 6 hours as needed.
- Anti-itch creams (Benadryl, Alveeno or Hydrocortisone .05%) are also available.

### Go to the emergency department immediately if you have:

- shortness of breath
- chest tightness/pressure
- swelling of lips, tongue or throat
- or any other serious concern

### Infections:

- There is an increased risk of serious infections associated with the uses of Rituximab. Any infections or fevers should be taken seriously & reviewed by your doctor.
- Do not have the Rituximab infusion if you suspect you have an infection or are being treated for an infection.



### Surgery, dental work or other procedures:

- Develop a plan with your doctor on upcoming procedures.
- It is important that Rituximab is not given again until the incision is healed with no open wounds or signs of infection.

### Rituximab should not be taken if you :

- have had a previous serious reaction to Rituximab.
- have an active infection.
- are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding.

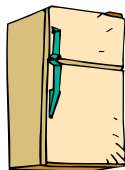


### Vaccines:

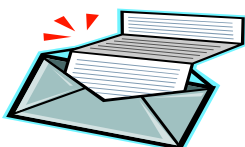
- All vaccinations should be up to date 4 weeks prior to starting rituximab
- No live vaccines should be taken while on Rituximab



## Storage:



## General medication considerations:



## Rituximab Support Line:



## Clinic Contact:

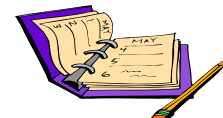
- Do not take flu & pneumovax vaccines within 14 days before or after receiving Rituximab.
- Refrigerate the medication at 2 - 8°C. Do not freeze.
- Carry rituximab with an icepack when travelling.

- 1. Take your medication as instructed by your physician.**  
Taking more medication than is recommended increases your risk of side effects. Skipping doses of medication will decrease the desired effect of the medication.

Once you are feeling better on Rituximab, you must continue to take your other medications, unless instructed otherwise by your rheumatologist.

- 2. See your rheumatologist after starting rituximab every 3 to 4 months.** These visits allow you & your doctor to assess how well your medications are working to manage your arthritis, any changes needed in your medications, and to reapply for provincial coverage as needed.

- 3. Keep a diary.**  
Record when you take your medications, any side effects & any reasons for changes or withdrawal of medications.



- 4. Keep a medication list in your wallet.**  
Record all medications, vitamin/mineral & herbal supplements you are presently taking & any allergies you may have.

Bring the list to all medical appointments with your doctor, nurse, etc.

## Roche Patient Assist Program: 1-888-748-8926

- A service that helps you find a way to cover the cost of Rituximab.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Disclaimer:**

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

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