

Alefacept (Amevive)

WHAT IS IT?

Alefacept (also known by its brand name Amevive) is a biologic medication approved in January 2003 by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for treating moderate to severe plaque psoriasis. Alefacept is available by prescription.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Alefacept works by blocking the activation of certain immune cells called T cells. Alefacept also kills some subsets of these cells. T cells are a type of white blood cell in the body. In psoriasis, once these T cells are mistakenly activated, they can trigger inflammation and other immune responses and fuel the development of psoriasis lesions. By blocking T-cell activation and by eliminating some of these cells, alefacept interrupts the cycle of psoriasis. This leads to improvement in symptoms for many people who take it.

WHO CAN TAKE IT?

Alefacept is prescribed for adults with moderate to severe psoriasis; it can help reduce the appearance of lesions on the skin.

WHO SHOULD NOT TAKE IT?

- People with HIV infection
- Children—the medication has not been approved for children

Caution is advised for the elderly, due to the already increased risk of infection for this age group. The impact of alefacept on pregnant women or developing fetuses is not known, nor is it known if the medication passes into breast milk in nursing women. . If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, talk to your doctor.

HOW IS IT USED?

Alefacept injections are given in a doctor's office into the muscle. Individuals receive one injection of 15 milligrams (mg) per week for 12 weeks. Additional 12-week cycles of the drug may be given, depending on how patients respond the first time, but they must usually wait at least 12 weeks between cycles. More people reached the 75 and 50 percent improvement targets after two cycles of treatment than after one, indicating there is a cumulative benefit of the medication for some people.

CAN IT BE USED WITH OTHER TREATMENTS?

There is data that suggest phototherapy in combination with alefacept may improve the outcome.

SIDE EFFECTS

The most common side effects are:

- sore throat
- dizziness
- cough
- nausea
- itching
- muscle aches
- chills
- injection site reactions
- accidental injury

These side effects were generally mild and did not cause most patients to stop taking alefacept.

EFFECTIVENESS

Psoriasis severity score

- Usually determined by examining the degree of redness, shedding, plaque thickness and affected body surface area. Some scores also take into consideration itching and the disease's effect on quality of life.
- In clinical trials, about 21 percent of patients saw 75 percent improvement in psoriasis severity scores after one 12-week course.

RISKS

Alefacept removes a specific kind of T cell, which normally helps us fight infections. In some people, this causes white blood cell counts to drop below normal levels. Your doctor will check your T cell counts with weekly blood tests. If they drop too low, your doctor may temporarily stop the treatment to avoid the possible risk of a serious infection.

Some people in clinical studies developed cancers. Tell your doctor if you have a bump or open sore that does not heal.

Some people developed serious infections, including wound infections and pneumonia. Tell your doctor if you see any signs of infections such as swollen glands, fever, or chills.

Some people treated with alefacept have had serious liver injury. Tell your doctor if your skin or the whites of your eyes become yellow, if you bruise easily, or if you have persistent loss of appetite or vomiting.

Alefacept should not be used in people who have HIV. It may speed up progression of the virus or cause complications.

For detailed information on side effects and safety, talk to your doctor.

PATIENT ASSISTANCE INFORMATION

Amevive Start Assistance Program (ASAP) provides help with insurance issues to people taking alefacept. For more information, call 866.AMEVIVE (866.263.8483) or visit www.amevive.com.

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