

Etanercept (Enbrel)

WHAT IS IT?

Etanercept (also known by its brand name Enbrel) is a biologic medication approved in April 2004 by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of moderate to severe plaque psoriasis. In January 2002, it was approved for psoriatic arthritis. It is also approved for treating rheumatoid arthritis, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis (arthritis affecting the spine). Etanercept is available by prescription.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Etanercept blocks tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-alpha), a chemical “messenger” in the immune system that signals other cells to cause inflammation. There is too much TNF-alpha in the skin and joints of people with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. Etanercept helps lower the amount of TNF-alpha, which interrupts the inflammatory cycle of psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. This leads to improvement for many people who take it.

WHO CAN TAKE IT?

Etanercept is prescribed for adults with moderate to severe plaque psoriasis; it can help reduce the appearance of lesions on the skin. In January 2008, Amgen filed for approval for pediatric psoriasis. It is also prescribed for people with active psoriatic arthritis; it may prevent further damage to joints.

WHO SHOULD NOT TAKE IT?

- People with active serious infections or a history of recurrent infections
- People with a history of heart failure
- People with multiple sclerosis or other types of demyelinating neurologic diseases

Caution is advised for the elderly, due to the already increased risk of infection for this age group. It is unknown what impact etanercept has on pregnant women or fetuses, nor is it known if the medication passes through breast milk. If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, talk to your doctor.

HOW IS IT USED?

Etanercept is given at home by an injection under the skin. The recommended dose for psoriasis is 50 mg twice weekly for three months, followed by a maintenance dose of 50 mg once weekly thereafter. The recommended dose for psoriatic arthritis is 50 mg per week. Etanercept is designed to be taken continuously to maintain improvement.

CAN IT BE USED WITH OTHER TREATMENTS?

Etanercept can be prescribed by itself or in combination with methotrexate. It is also safe to take it with phototherapy, topical treatments or pain relievers, such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Talk to your doctor about any other medications, vitamins or supplements you may be taking.

SIDE EFFECTS

The most common side effects are:

- dizziness
- sore throat
- cough
- stomach pain
- injection site reactions
- upper respiratory infections
- headache
- rhinitis (irritation of the nose)

These side effects were generally mild and did not cause most patients to stop taking etanercept. These happened most often after the first dose and may decrease after additional doses.

EFFECTIVENESS

Psoriasis severity score

- Usually determined by examining the degree of redness, shedding, plaque thickness and affected body surface area. Some scores take into consideration itching and the disease's effect on quality of life.
- In clinical trials, about 49 percent of patients experienced 75 percent improvement in psoriasis severity scores after 3 months.

Arthritis severity score

- Usually determined by examining swelling in and around the joints and taking into consideration joint tenderness, pain, physical function and morning stiffness.
- In clinical trials, nearly 37percent of people experienced a 50 percent improvement in arthritis severity scores.

RISKS

Etanercept is not recommended for someone with an active infection or a history of recurring infections. Tell your doctor if you have a fever, cough, flu-like symptoms, feel very tired, or have warm, red, or painful skin.

People should be evaluated for latent TB infections by getting a TB skin test or chest X-ray prior to treatment with etanercept. Hidden TB must be treated before people can begin taking etanercept.

There have been rare reports of central nervous system disorders in association with the use of etanercept. Tell your doctor if you have a fever that does not go away, look very pale or bruise or bleed very easily.

Due to rare reports of blood disorders, people taking etanercept are advised to contact their doctor if they experience persistent fever, bruising, bleeding or paleness.

There have been reports of new or worsening heart failure in people taking etanercept. Tell your doctor if you have shortness of breath, sudden weight gain or swelling of your ankles or feet.

There is the risk of an allergic reaction to this drug. Signs of a serious allergic reaction include a skin rash, a swollen face, or trouble breathing.

Your risk of getting lymphoma, a type of blood cancer, may increase by taking etanercept.

Some individuals have developed lupus-like symptoms that decreased after their treatment was stopped. Tell your doctor if you develop chest pains that do not go away, shortness of breath, joint pain, or a rash on your cheeks or arms that is sensitive to the sun.

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

PATIENT ASSISTANCE INFORMATION

Amgen has a special program where patients and doctors can get help with insurance questions and other issues. For more information, call 888.4ENBREL (888.436.2735) or visit www.enbrel.com.

The ENcourage Foundation provides access to etanercept for certain patients who need help paying for etanercept. Call 1.800.393.4675 for enrollment and more information.

National Psoriasis Foundation educational materials are medically reviewed and are not intended to replace the counsel of a physician. The Psoriasis Foundation does not endorse any medications, products or treatments for psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis and advises you to consult a physician before initiating any treatment.