

## Infliximab (Remicade)

### WHAT IS IT?

Infliximab (also known by its brand name Remicade) is a biologic medication that was first approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis in 1998. It was approved for psoriatic arthritis in 2005 and for psoriasis in 2006. It is also indicated to treat ankylosing spondylitis, ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. Infliximab is available by prescription.

### HOW DOES IT WORK?

Infliximab 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 of people with psoriasis and the joints of people with certain types of arthritis. Infliximab 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?

Infliximab is prescribed for adults with moderate to severe psoriasis; it can help reduce the appearance of lesions on the skin. 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 people who experience any numbness or tingling; have ever had a disease that affects the nervous system; and the elderly. The impact of infliximab 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?

Infliximab is given by infusion and the recommended starting dose is about 5 milligrams of drug per kilogram of body weight. Three infusions are given in a doctor's office or infusion center during the first six weeks of treatment. During an infusion, the medication is administered by IV in the course of about two to three hours. After the first three treatments, people receive infusions at regular intervals of about every eight weeks.

### CAN IT BE USED WITH OTHER TREATMENTS?

Infliximab can be prescribed by itself or in combination treatment with methotrexate. Talk to your doctor about any other medications, vitamins or supplements you may be taking.

### SIDE EFFECTS

The most common side effects are:

- infusion reactions
- upper respiratory infections
- headache
- rash
- coughing
- stomach pain

These side effects were generally mild and did not cause most patients to stop taking infliximab. 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 also take into consideration itching and the disease's quality of life.
- In clinical trials, 80 percent of patients saw 75 percent improvement in psoriasis severity scores within 10 weeks.

### 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, about 40 percent of patients saw a 50 percent improvement in arthritis severity scores at week 24.

## RISKS

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

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

Infliximab may worsen existing heart failure. Tell your doctor if you experience shortness of breath, sudden weight gain or swelling of the ankles or feet.

In rare cases, some people receiving infliximab developed severe liver damage. Tell your doctor if you have changes in your vision, weakness, numbness, tingling or seizures.

In some people taking infliximab, the body may not make enough of the blood cells that help fight infections or help stop bleeding. Tell your doctor if you have a fever, look very pale or bruise or bleed very easily.

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

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.

Some individuals have developed lupus-like symptoms that decreased after their treatment was stopped. Tell your doctor if you develop constant chest pains, shortness of breath, joint pain or a rash on your cheeks or arms that is sensitive to the sun.

Some people taking a TNF-alpha blocker such as infliximab have reported reactivation of hepatitis B virus. Some of these cases have been fatal. Tell your doctor if you know or think you may be a carrier of hepatitis B. Signs of hepatitis B infection include feeling unwell, poor appetite, tiredness, and fever.

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

## PATIENT ASSISTANCE INFORMATION

Centocor has a patient assistance program to help provide discounted medications to people who qualify, based on income levels and other factors. For more information, call 866.489.5957.

*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.*