

Rifampicin for Itch in chronic liver disease

Information for patients



Abdominal Medicine
and Surgery

This leaflet aims to provide patients with some more specific information about the use of rifampicin to treat itch for patients with chronic liver disease.

Introduction

You have been started on a medicine called rifampicin for itch.

Rifampicin is an antibiotic that is used to treat various conditions. It is not licensed by drug companies to treat itch, however it is used commonly by liver doctors for this reason with good effect.

How to take

Rifampicin comes in capsule or liquid form.

Rifampicin works best if you take it on an empty stomach (i.e. at least 30 minutes before a meal or 2 hours after a meal). If you are taking rifampicin capsules, swallow them whole with a glass of water.

Side effects

Rifampicin can discolour (yellow, brown, orange or red colour) urine, tears, saliva, sweat or phlegm (sputum). This is quite common and you need not worry. However, the colour may permanently stain soft contact lenses. The colour in tears may also last for some time after stopping rifampicin.

For a full list of side-effects, please see the manufacturer leaflet included in your box of rifampicin (however note this leaflet will contain information relating to rifampicin use for various infections).

Blood tests

Rifampicin can affect your liver function tests, so you will need to have these checked every week for the first 2 weeks of treatment, then every 2 weeks for the next 10 weeks. If you remain on rifampicin after these first 3 months, you will need blood tests less often - usually every 3 months, or as recommended by your liver team.

Effects on other medicines

Rifampicin affects the way your body processes certain medicines, so can affect the levels of other medicines that you take. **Please check with your doctor or pharmacist that rifampicin is ok with your other medicines.**

Examples include oral contraceptives and immunosuppression/anti-rejection medicine (tacrolimus, ciclosporin, sirolimus, azathioprine, mycophenolate).

Due to issues with other medicines, if you have had a transplant in the past, make sure that your transplant team are aware that you are on rifampicin and there is a plan for managing your immunosuppression with rifampicin before you start taking it.

Rifampicin may make the oral contraceptive "pill" work less well. This means you should change to a different type of contraception that will be effective. Instead, you must

use a non-hormonal barrier method of contraception such as condoms, or get an intra-uterine device/system such as “the”coil” while taking rifampicin. If you have any questions or are unsure about this, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Due to potential risks in pregnancy, talk to your doctor before taking rifampicin if you are pregnant, plan to get pregnant or think you are pregnant.

Rifampicin can also be found in breast milk. If you are breastfeeding or planning to breastfeed, talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking rifampicin.

Contact details

If you have any questions about rifampicin use for itch, please contact:

Liver pharmacy team - telephone 01132066826

or email: leedsth-tr.mmpsliverteam@nhs.net

Clinical nurse specialist team - telephone 01132069275

or email: leedsth-tr.hepatologypatientadvice@nhs.net



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© The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust • 1st edition (Ver 1.0)
Developed by: Louise Hogg, Advanced Clinical Pharmacist - Hepatology
Produced by: Medical Illustration Services • MID code: 20211019_016/RC

LN005168
Publication date
12/2021
Review date
12/2023