

Amiodarone

Introduction

This leaflet has been produced for all patients taking amiodarone as a short guide to provide you with information regarding the safe use and monitoring of amiodarone and the review process for patients to ensure they should still be on the treatment.

As with all medicines, you should make sure that you read the manufacturer's leaflet as well as this leaflet before you start taking amiodarone.

What is amiodarone and what is it used for?

Amiodarone belongs to the group of medicines known as anti-arrhythmics. It is used to control an irregular or rapid heart rate. It acts on the heart cells and slows the electrical signals sent through the heart.

Dose

Once established on the treatment, patients take a once daily dose. The dose is 200mg daily, or 100mg daily in some older people. If your dose is higher check with your GP.

Take your tablets at about the same time each day. Tablets should be swallowed whole with a glass of water.

Amiodarone isn't always needed long-term and should be reviewed regularly by your doctor. Ask your doctor how long you are supposed to be taking amiodarone for, **especially if you have been taking it for a year or longer.**

Do not stop taking your tablets without talking to your doctor first.

If you miss a dose of amiodarone, take it as soon as you remember. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and continue taking it at the usual times. Never take two doses at the same time to make up. If in doubt speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

Driving and using machinery

Amiodarone may cause blurred vision in some people. If this happens do not drive or operate machinery.

Alcohol

You should limit the amount of alcohol you drink whilst you are being treated with amiodarone

Other Medicines

Some medicines may interact with amiodarone and affect its levels. These include:

- Antibiotics e.g. erythromycin, moxifloxacin, sulfamethoxazole, co-trimoxazole
- Beta-blockers
- Calcium channel blockers e.g. diltiazem, verapamil
- Other cardiac drugs e.g. flecainide, disopyramide, procainamide, quinidine, digoxin, ivabradine
- Lithium
- Phenytoin
- Simvastatin (If the dose is greater than 20mg)
- Tricyclic antidepressants e.g. amitriptyline
- Warfarin – you may need to change the dose of warfarin when you start taking amiodarone and also if you stop amiodarone.

Do not take grapefruit juice whilst taking amiodarone.

There may be other medicines - including over the counter (OTC) and herbal supplements - that may interact so it's always best to check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are started on any new medicine to remind them that you are taking amiodarone.

Please note it takes a long time for amiodarone to be removed from the body so drug interactions can occur several weeks or even months after treatment has stopped.

Possible side effects

Some side effects are not serious and only temporary such as feeling sick and headaches.

The tests as detailed at the bottom of this page are meant to detect early signs of other side effects as described below.

Skin

Amiodarone increases your sensitivity to sunlight so whilst taking it you should avoid exposure to direct sunlight or sunlamps. When you are in the sun, wear a wide brimmed hat and keep your arms and legs covered. Apply a total sunblock to exposed areas of skin.

This sensitivity can continue for up to 10 months after stopping amiodarone.

Amiodarone can cause your skin to have a blue or grey tinge, which should slowly decrease if amiodarone is stopped but it may not go completely. If you notice this, you should contact a GP.

Eyes

Amiodarone can affect your eyesight. In the event of unusual eye disturbances, seek advice from your optician.

In rare cases blurred vision may occur or it may make you see a 'halo' around things. If you notice this, you should tell your GP.

Thyroid Gland

Amiodarone can make you produce too little thyroid hormone which may make you feel tired and put on weight. However, it may make you produce too much hormone making you sweat, feel shaky, lose weight or have a fast heartbeat.

If you notice this, you should tell your GP.

Heart

Amiodarone may cause heart problems, such as slowing of the heart. This may make you feel tired, dizzy or faint. If you notice this, you should tell your GP as soon as possible.

Lungs

Amiodarone can cause damage to your lungs which can be reversed if detected early. Early signs of damage include developing a cough, breathlessness, and high temperature that doesn't clear up or gets worse. If any of these occur, see your GP as soon as possible

Liver

Amiodarone can affect your liver. If you notice yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice) you should see your GP immediately.

Nervous System

Amiodarone can cause side effects to the nervous system, including shaking, unsteady walking, weakness of the hands or legs, and pins and needles. You should contact your GP as the dose may need to be lowered.

Monitoring before and during treatment:

Amiodarone is usually prescribed by a heart specialist after a number of tests have been performed to ensure that amiodarone is suitable for you.

Amiodarone can have effects in the body for a long time, even if you stop taking it. It is important that the monitoring below is carried out at the recommended intervals and for 12 months after you stop taking Amiodarone. Check with your GP if it's over 6 months since your last test. Your GP may also choose to order other tests.

Test	Frequency
Liver and Kidney Function Tests	6 Monthly
Thyroid function Tests	6 Monthly
Eye test	12 Monthly

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For information about heart disease in general contact

British Heart Foundation 0300 330 3322

www.bhf.org.uk