

# Taking tacrolimus for corneal eye inflammation

Department of Ophthalmology

Information for Patients

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## What is tacrolimus?

Tacrolimus is a drug that can be helpful for people with eczema and allergic conditions, known as atopy. It is given to patients who have this condition as it has proved to be useful in controlling the symptoms of the illness.

It may be available under different brand names. We prescribe the brand of tacrolimus called Prograf which is available as capsules (1mg). Different brands may work differently, so it is important you have the Prograf brand when you collect your prescription.

**Please note:** it is important that you read the manufacturer's leaflet as well as this one because it contains general information about the drug that you will need to know.

However, please remember that it is not written for patients with eye conditions, so some of the information in it may not be relevant to you.

## Why have I been given tacrolimus?

You have been given this drug to improve your eye condition. It is not a pain reliever and doesn't work straight away, but it tends to improve the symptoms over a longer period of time.

If you are on painkillers or anti-inflammatory drugs, it is important that you should carry on taking them unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

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or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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## How will tacrolimus help me?

Tacrolimus works by stopping inflammation, by acting on certain cells in the immune system.

Some types of conditions can cause inflammation in the eye which can be painful. Tacrolimus aims to reduce these symptoms. It is also used to stop rejection of a corneal transplant. You need to carry on taking tacrolimus unless you are told to stop by a doctor.

If you stop taking tacrolimus please contact the nurse specialist in your eye department.

## What dose of tacrolimus should I take?

Tacrolimus is usually taken 2 times a day. At 10am and 10pm. You should take them with food or just after food. Do not break or crush them. Do not take any that are broken or split. Your doctor will advise you about the exact dose.

You should make sure you are only given Prograf as other types of tacrolimus work differently.

You may start on a low strength dose of tacrolimus. This may be increased at follow-up appointments. It can take a few weeks to start to work, as the level of drug builds up in your blood over time.

Do not alter your dose unless your doctor has told you to. Tacrolimus is affected by some antibiotics, tell your doctor if you are taking antibiotic medication. Whilst taking Tacrolimus do not use any over-the-counter medicines without getting advice from your GP.

## Are there any side effects or risks?

All drugs have side effects, although most patients do not experience any. Side effects include:

- feeling sick (nausea)
- diarrhoea
- skin rash
- stomach ache
- headache
- difficulty sleeping (insomnia)
- dizziness

**While taking the drug you will be at an increased risk of:**

- anaemia (lower iron levels).
- affects on the liver and kidneys (monitored by regular blood tests).
- infections. Contact your GP if you think you may have any kind of infection, as an infection can be more serious when taking this drug.
- hair loss / thinning hair
- diabetes
- small risk of developing a cancer of your glands used to fight infection (lymphatic glands, lymphoma). You should be aware of any changes in skin, or any new lumps. Wear a high factor sun cream (30 SPF) and cover up when you are in the sun.
- effects on the rhythm of the heart.
- high blood pressure (monitored in clinic).

**What should I avoid or be aware of while taking tacrolimus?**

- Avoid excessive exposure to UV light including sunlight, as the drug can make it more likely to get sun burnt.
- The drug can affect the unborn child and pass through milk if breastfeeding. You will be asked to avoid getting pregnant and stop breastfeeding while on the medication.
- Tacrolimus lowers your bodies ability to fight infection. If you have any signs of infection, such as a temperature or cough you need to see your GP. Any infection can be worse, and make you feel ill for longer. A letter will be sent to your GP to tell them that you are taking tacrolimus.
- Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice.

**Vaccinations**

We advise you to have the flu (influenza) and pneumonia (pneumovax II) vaccine. Please get these from your GP as normal.

You should not have any live vaccines, such as polio, MMR, and yellow fever if you are taking tacrolimus

## Having regular blood tests

If you are taking tacrolimus you will need to have regular blood tests to check that the drug is not affecting your body. If you do not have regular blood tests we will need to stop the tacrolimus.

You can book a blood test with your GP, or you can come to the walk in test centre in the Balmoral Building at the Leicester Royal Infirmary at any time to have this done.

Blood test must be done **before** you take your tablet, at 9am before you take your tablet at 10am.

We need to know the amount of drug in your blood, so we can make sure the dose is correct.

A blood test should be done every week, for the first 6 weeks; then once a month while you are taking the drug.

The blood forms will be given to you in clinic to start with, you will need to give these to the person taking your blood. You need to contact the specialist nurse to have more blood forms posted to you.

## Who should I contact if I have any concerns?

If you have any concerns or questions about your treatment, you should talk to your doctor or nurse. You can also contact us from the details below:

Corneal Nurse Specialist: 07970 940 125 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday

Eye Casualty Department: 0116 258 6273 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Saturday, 08.30am-12.30pm Sunday

Ophthalmology Secretary: 0116 258 5913 9.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday

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