

Amiodarone

Patient information sheet

This leaflet is for all patients taking amiodarone to provide you with information how to take amiodarone safely and how you will be monitored whilst you are taking this medication.

As with all medicines, you should make sure that you read the manufacturer's patient information leaflet (PIL) that comes with the medication, as well as this leaflet before you start taking amiodarone.

What is amiodarone used for?

Amiodarone is a type of medicine known as an anti-arrhythmic. It is used to control an irregular or rapid heart rate. Irregular or fast rhythms may affect either the top two chambers (atria) or bottom two chambers of the heart (ventricles). If you have had heart surgery, it may also be used to prevent or treat a well-known complication known as atrial fibrillation.

Dose

The usual starting dose is 200mg three times a day for one week, then 200mg twice a day for one week, then 200mg daily. If you have been prescribed amiodarone as a preventative measure following heart surgery, you will be instructed to take 200mg three times a day for five days only.

In the case that you would need to take it for a longer course of up to six weeks after surgery, your GP should check your heart rhythm by performing an electrocardiogram (ECG) within one week of stopping the medication.

What are the side effects?

Many side effects are only temporary, such as nausea or headaches. If these last more than a few days tell your doctor. Other more long-term side effects include:

- **Skin:** Amiodarone increases your sensitivity to sunlight and may cause grey-blue skin discolouration, which can continue for several months after you stop taking amiodarone. Avoid sunbeds and sun lamps. When you are in the sun, wear additional protective clothing and apply factor 30-50 sunscreen to exposed areas of skin.
- **Eyes:** Amiodarone can cause small deposits at the front of the eye. These are not harmful and usually go away when you stop taking amiodarone. These do not affect your daytime vision but bright lights at night may dazzle you or you may see a yellow halo when driving a car. If your vision becomes blurred or you cannot see as well as you could before, talk to your optician.
- **Thyroid:** Amiodarone can cause your thyroid gland to produce too little thyroid hormone, which may make you feel tired or gain weight. It may also result in too much thyroid hormone making you sweat, feel shaky, lose weight or have a fast heart rate. If you notice any of these side effects, tell your doctor.

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Large print copies and alternative language versions of this leaflet can be made available on request.

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If you have been advised to take amiodarone on a long-term basis, your GP should repeat the following tests:

Test	Frequency
Liver and kidney function	Every 6 months
Thyroid function test	Every 6 months
Eye test	Every 12 months

- **Lungs:** Amiodarone may affect your lungs which, can be reversed if detected early. Early symptoms include a cough, breathlessness and a high temperature that does not clear up or gets worse. If you notice any of these symptoms, you should make an appointment to see your doctor as soon as you can.
- **Liver:** Amiodarone rarely causes a problem with the liver. If you notice that your skin or eyes are becoming yellow, tell your doctor.
- **Heart:** Amiodarone can slow your heart rate too much making you feel tired and dizzy. If you notice these symptoms, tell your doctor.

Other food and medicines

Amiodarone can potentially interact with other medicines, including any over-the-counter medications and herbal supplements. Please notify your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking any new medication.

It is advised to avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice whilst taking amiodarone and for several months after stopping.

Pregnancy

If you are of childbearing age and planning to become pregnant, please inform your doctor as soon as possible.

Monitoring

Prior to treatment, your specialist will undertake a number of blood tests and investigations to ensure that your kidneys, lungs, liver and thyroid are working well. They will also check levels of any other drugs you are prescribed that may interact, to make sure they are in range.

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