Ciclosporin

arthritis-uk.org

Ciclosporin is used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis and lupus

Arthritis UK

We are Arthritis UK

We're the 10 million adults, young people and children living with arthritis. We're the carers, researchers and healthcare professionals. The families and the friends. All united by one powerful vision: a future free from arthritis. So that one day, no one will have to live with the physical, emotional and practical challenges that arthritis brings.

There are many different types of arthritis. And we understand that every day is different. What's more, what works for one person may not help another. That's why our trusted information blends the latest research and expert advice with a range of lived experiences. In this way, we aim to give you everything you need to know about your condition, the treatments available and the many options you can try, so that you can make better-informed choices to suit your needs.

We're always happy to hear from you whether it's with feedback on our information, to share your story, or just to find out more about the work of Arthritis UK. **Contact us at healthinfo@arthritis-uk.org**

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Introduction

Ciclosporin is a drug that can help prevent your condition causing damage to your body. You can discuss the benefits and risks of taking ciclosporin with your healthcare professionals before you start treatment, so you're able to make an informed decision.

What is ciclosporin?

Ciclosporin is a type of drug known as a disease modifying anti-rheumatic drug, or DMARD.

In some conditions, the immune system becomes overactive and instead of fighting infection as it's supposed to, it attacks the body's own healthy tissues. Ciclosporin can reduce activity in the immune system and help prevent damage to joints.

Ciclosporin can reduce pain, swelling and stiffness in rheumatoid arthritis. It can also be used to treat a number of other autoimmune and inflammatory conditions, including psoriatic arthritis and lupus.

Ciclosporin is a long-term treatment and it may be up to four months before you notice the benefits. It's important to keep taking it, unless you have severe side effects:

- even if it doesn't seem to be working at first
- even when your symptoms start to improve, to help keep your condition under control.

How is ciclosporin used?

Ciclosporin may not be suitable if:

- you have kidney problems
- you have high blood pressure that isn't controlled by medication
- you have gout or high levels of urate in your blood
- you've had cancer.

Your doctor will check your blood pressure and arrange for you to have a blood and urine test before you start treatment.

If ciclosporin isn't suitable, your doctor will discuss other treatment options with you.

How is ciclosporin taken?

Ciclosporin is usually prescribed under its brand names: Neoral, Deximune and Capimune.

Ciclosporin is taken as capsules to swallow. The capsules will need to be swallowed with water, and you should not chew or open them.

Ciclosporin is also available as a liquid to drink. For this method of taking ciclosporin, you'll need to measure out the correct dose using the syringe that comes with your medicine. Mix it with water and stir it well. After you've taken it, add some more water, swish the water around and drink that, to make sure you've taken all the medicine.

Don't drink grapefruit juice or pomelo juice to take your ciclosporin with. These can increase the amount of ciclosporin in your body and so increase the risk of side effects. It's best to

completely avoid drinking these fruit juices or eating these fruits when taking ciclosporin.

It might be a good idea to take the medicine at the same time each day, so that you get into a routine of taking it.

Your doctor will advise you about the correct dose. Usually you'll start on a low dose, and your doctor may increase it if necessary. The dose you're given will depend on your body weight and how well your kidneys are working.

Side effects and risks

Possible side effects of ciclosporin include a rise in blood pressure and effects on your kidneys.

Ciclosporin can sometimes cause increased levels of fatty substances called lipids in the blood, which could affect your health. You should report any headaches, as well as any changes or problems with your eyesight to your doctor straight away.

You'll have regular blood tests and your blood pressure will need to be checked frequently while you're on ciclosporin. You may be asked to keep a record of your blood test results in a booklet, and you should take it with you when you visit your GP or the hospital.

You must not take ciclosporin unless you're having regular checks.

While the drug itself is the same across the different brands of ciclosporin, some are absorbed faster than others by the body.

Your doctor will try to keep you on the same brand if possible. If it's necessary to change to another brand, your doctor may ask you to have more frequent checks to make sure the levels of drug in your

blood remain the same. To improve side effects, you may be advised to reduce the dose of ciclosporin.

You should tell your doctor or rheumatology specialist nurse if you develop any of the following after starting ciclosporin:

- feeling sick
- diarrhoea
- headaches
- any problems or changes to your eyesight
- enlargement of the gums in the mouth
- tiredness
- excess hair growth
- any other new symptoms or anything else that concerns you.

Contact your doctor immediately if any of these symptoms are severe.

Ciclosporin can increase your risk of infection, you should report any new symptoms such as a sore throat, flu-like symptoms or high temperature to your GP as soon as possible.

You should also see your doctor as soon as possible if you develop chickenpox or shingles or come into contact with someone who has chickenpox or shingles. These infections can be severe in people on treatments that affect the immune system such as ciclosporin. You may need antiviral treatment, and your ciclosporin is usually stopped until you're better.

Tips to reduce your risk of infection

- Try to avoid close contact with people you know have an infection.
- Wash your hands regularly and carry around a small bottle of antibacterial hand gel.
- Keep your mouth clean by brushing your teeth regularly.
- Stop smoking if you're a smoker.
- Make sure your food is stored and prepared properly.
- Try to keep your house clean and hygienic, especially the kitchen, bathrooms and toilets.

Effects on other treatments

Ciclosporin may be prescribed along with other drugs to treat your condition. However, some drugs may interact with ciclosporin, so you should discuss any new medications with your doctor or a pharmacist before starting them. You should always tell anybody treating you that you're taking ciclosporin.

You should only take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) on the advice of your GP or rheumatologist.

You can carry on taking painkillers as well as ciclosporin, unless your doctor advises otherwise.

Don't take complementary treatments without discussing this first with your doctor, rheumatology specialist nurse or pharmacist.

It's important to avoid any products that contain the complementary treatment St John's Wort when taking ciclosporin, because this can reduce the effects of the drug.

Vaccinations

If you're on ciclosporin you should avoid live vaccines such as yellow fever. In certain situations, however, a live vaccine may be necessary, in which case your doctor will discuss the possible risks and benefits of the immunisation with you.

The Shingrix shingles vaccine is not a live vaccine, and it's recommended you have it if you're on ciclosporin.

The pneumonia vaccine and yearly flu vaccines don't interact with ciclosporin and are recommended.

Having an operation or dental treatment

If you're due to have surgery or a dental treatment, talk to your doctor or healthcare team.

Alcohol

There's no particular reason to avoid alcohol while on ciclosporin, so it's fine to drink alcohol in moderation.

You can find out more about units of alcohol at **drinkaware.co.uk**

Fertility, pregnancy and breastfeeding

Current guidelines state that ciclosporin can be taken during pregnancy. If you're planning a family or if you become pregnant while taking ciclosporin you should discuss this with your doctor.

The drug may pass into breast milk but is barely detectable in babies, so is unlikely to be harmful.

Men can take ciclosporin when trying for a baby.

This booklet is a guide to ciclosporin, its benefits and potential side effects. If there's anything else you'd like to know about this drug, just ask the healthcare professionals in charge of your care.

Visit our website **arthritis-uk.org** to find out more

Notes

Notes

Discover our support services

You don't need to face arthritis alone. Get the information, advice and support that you need.

Call our free helpline:
0800 5200 520

Connect with our online community, go to:
community.arthritis-uk.org

Chat with AVA, our online assistant, go to:
arthritis-uk.org/ask-AVA-our-virtual-assistant

Track your symptoms with our easy app, go to:
arthritis-uk.org/track-my-arthritis-symptoms-app

Thank you!

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We would also like to give a special thank you to the people who shared their opinions and thoughts on the booklet. Your contributions make sure the information we provide is relevant and suitable for everyone.

Support our work

At Arthritis UK we rely on donations to fund our work. Help support people with arthritis and fund life-changing research by making a donation today. Every contribution makes a difference.

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Join our community

Sign up today and we'll be in touch by email a few times a month with the latest arthritis news, including research and campaign updates, as well as tips and advice about how to live well with arthritis, and ways you can get involved.

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