

Infliximab

[arthritis-uk.org](https://www.arthritis-uk.org)

Infliximab is a drug used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis and axial spondyloarthritis, including ankylosing spondylitis

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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What is infliximab?

Infliximab is a type of drug known as a biological therapy.

In rheumatoid arthritis and some other conditions, too much of a protein called TNF is produced in the body. This causes inflammation, pain and damage to your joints. Anti-TNF drugs such as infliximab block TNF and so reduce this inflammation.

Infliximab isn't a painkiller, but it can treat your condition. You should start to feel better over a period of 2–12 weeks.

Who can take infliximab?

Infliximab can be prescribed for:

- rheumatoid arthritis
- psoriatic arthritis
- axial spondyloarthritis.

There are guidelines about when infliximab can be used. It varies depending on which condition you have. You won't be given infliximab if you haven't tried other suitable drugs first.

Infliximab won't be started if:

- your condition isn't active
- you haven't tried other treatments for your condition first
- you have a severe infection.

Your doctor may decide not to prescribe infliximab if you've had or have:

- an active infection, or repeated or serious infections
- multiple sclerosis (MS) or there's a history of MS in your immediate family
- cancer
- certain heart conditions
- scarring of the lung tissue, known as pulmonary fibrosis.

Before you're prescribed infliximab, doctors sometimes use a scoring system to assess how many of your joints are painful or swollen and how it makes you feel. This helps them work out how active your arthritis is.

You'll also need blood tests before treatment to see whether the drug is suitable for you.

Before starting infliximab, you'll have a chest X-ray and tests to check if you've ever been exposed to tuberculosis (TB). If you have been exposed, you may need treatment for TB for a few months before you can start taking infliximab. You'll also be checked for HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C infections, as infliximab may increase the risk of these conditions starting up again or getting worse.

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

You'll have regular tests while taking infliximab to monitor its effects.

How is infliximab taken?

Infliximab is usually given through a drip into a vein, known as an intravenous infusion. It's usually done in a hospital and takes about two hours. You'll need to wait for another hour or two before you go home in case you develop any side effects.

Initially, you'll have your second infusion around two weeks after the first, and a third about four weeks after that. After that, you'll have them around every eight weeks.

Once you've been taking infliximab for a while, the infusions may take less time. In some cases, you may be able to take infliximab as an injection instead at home.

Because it's a long-term treatment, unless your doctor or healthcare team says otherwise, it's important to keep taking infliximab:

- even if it doesn't seem to be working at first
- even when your symptoms start to improve.

Biosimilars

Infliximab was originally only available as a drug called Remicade. However, newer versions of biological therapies are becoming available, so you may be prescribed infliximab under a different name, such as Flixabi, Inflectra, Remsima or Zessly.

Side effects and risks

Like all drugs, infliximab can sometimes cause side effects. Some common side effects include:

- a blocked or runny nose
- headaches
- dizziness
- a rash
- tummy pain
- indigestion
- feeling sick
- difficulty breathing
- feeling tired.

You should seek urgent medical attention if you develop symptoms such as:

- rash, mouth or throat ulcers
- sore throat, sore mouth or mouth ulcers
- fever
- unexplained bruising or bleeding
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea or weight loss
- yellowing of the skin, known as jaundice
- severe tummy pain
- breathlessness, infection or cough.

Some people may have an allergic reaction to the infusion. This is more likely during or soon after the first few infusions.

The infusion will be stopped if the reaction is severe. If you think you may be having a reaction to infliximab at any other time, or if you experience a fast or irregular heartbeat, you should speak to your doctor or healthcare team straight away.

Because infliximab affects the immune system, it can make you more likely to pick up infections.

Tell your doctor or healthcare team straight away if you develop any signs of an infection. They may also recommend that you temporarily stop infliximab if you are taking antibiotics.

You should see your doctor if you develop chickenpox or shingles, or if you come into contact with someone who has developed these illnesses.

These illnesses can be more severe if you're taking infliximab. You may need treatment for them and your infliximab may be stopped until you're better.

Infliximab may make you more sensitive to the sun and could put you at a higher risk of skin cancer. To be on the safe side, make sure to wear SPF 30 or higher sunscreen and regularly check your skin for any new spots or changes to your freckles or moles.

Very rarely, infliximab may cause a condition called drug-induced lupus. Symptoms include a rash, fever and increased joint pain. If you have any of these symptoms, speak to your doctor or healthcare team.

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.

Carrying an alert card

It's recommended that you carry a biological therapy alert card so anyone treating you will know that you're on infliximab.

Ask your healthcare team for a card.

Effects on other treatments

Check with your doctor before starting any new medicines. Remember to mention you're on infliximab if you're treated by anyone other than your usual healthcare team, as it won't appear on your repeat prescription list from your GP.

You can carry on taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or painkillers, if needed, unless your doctor advises otherwise.

Before using complementary treatments, such as herbal remedies, discuss it with your doctor or healthcare team.

Vaccinations

It's best to discuss vaccinations with your healthcare team before starting infliximab.

It's very important that you have the pneumonia vaccine, COVID-19 vaccine and yearly injectable flu vaccines to reduce your risk of infection. These vaccines are not live, so it's safe for you to have them.

You should avoid having live vaccines such as MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), nasal flu or yellow fever. Discuss this with your doctor or healthcare team.

If you've never had chickenpox, it can be good to be vaccinated against it before starting infliximab. But discuss this with your healthcare team first.

The shingles vaccine, Shingrix, is a non-live vaccine. It's recommended that you have it if you're taking infliximab.

Having an operation or dental procedure

If you're having surgery or a dental procedure, talk to your surgeon and healthcare team. They'll advise you on whether you need to stop infliximab before and after the procedure.

Alcohol

There's no known interaction between infliximab and alcohol, so it's fine to have a drink if you're taking this medicine.

Government guidelines say both men and women should have no more than 14 units of alcohol a week. This is equivalent to about six glasses of wine or six pints of beer.

If you are taking methotrexate alongside infliximab, you should avoid alcohol.

Fertility, pregnancy and breastfeeding

If you're planning to try for a baby, if you become pregnant, or if you're thinking of breastfeeding, we suggest you discuss your medicines with your doctor or healthcare team.

Current guidelines suggest that men and women can take infliximab when trying for a baby.

You can take infliximab in the first 20 weeks of your pregnancy. It's best not to take it after that, so that your child can be vaccinated at the normal time.

But if your arthritis is bad, you might be advised to take infliximab throughout your pregnancy.

If you do, then your baby should not have any live vaccines, such as the rotavirus vaccine, until they're six months old or as advised by your healthcare team. This is because small amounts of the drug can pass to the baby during pregnancy and may stay in their body for a short time after birth.

You can breastfeed on this medicine.



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

Discover our support services

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Track your symptoms with our easy app, go to:
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Thank you!

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