

Hydroxychloroquine

arthritis-uk.org

Hydroxychloroquine
is a drug used to treat
rheumatoid arthritis,
lupus and juvenile
idiopathic arthritis

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 hydroxychloroquine?

Hydroxychloroquine is a disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drug (DMARD). It regulates the activity of the immune system, which may be overactive in some conditions. Hydroxychloroquine can modify the underlying disease process, rather than simply treating the symptoms.

Hydroxychloroquine doesn't work immediately. It may be 12 weeks or longer before you notice any benefit. Because it's a long-term treatment it's important to keep taking hydroxychloroquine, unless you have severe side effects:

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

If you have been taking it for rheumatoid arthritis for more than 6 months and you do not feel it's helping, speak to your doctor or healthcare team.

Who can take hydroxychloroquine?

Hydroxychloroquine is used to treat:

- rheumatoid arthritis
- lupus
- juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA).

In the long term, hydroxychloroquine can reduce pain, swelling and joint stiffness. If you have lupus, it may also improve the rash.

Hydroxychloroquine is often taken in combination with other drugs such as methotrexate.

Before starting on hydroxychloroquine, your doctor may take a blood test to check that your liver and kidneys are working normally, but you won't normally need any regular blood tests during the treatment.

Your doctor will ask you about any problems with your eyesight and may suggest you have a vision test. Hydroxychloroquine won't usually be recommended if you have problems with the central part of the retina in the eye, known as maculopathy.

How is hydroxychloroquine taken?

Hydroxychloroquine is taken in tablet form, with or after food.

Your doctor will advise you about the correct dose. Adults usually start on a full dose of 200–400 mg daily, and later your doctor may reduce this.



Taking your medication regularly can make a real difference. Download the free My Arthritis app to set medication reminders, track symptoms and flare-ups, and prepare questions for your healthcare team.



Side effects and risks

Hydroxychloroquine can sometimes cause side effects, which may include:

- skin rashes, especially those made worse by sunlight
- stomach pain, feeling or being sick
- diarrhoea
- headaches
- loss of appetite
- changes in mood
- visual problems.

There is a small risk that hydroxychloroquine can damage a part of the inside of the eye called the retina. This increases with long-term use and higher dosage.

Your doctor will advise you on a safe dose to take according to your weight.

If you've been taking hydroxychloroquine for 5 years, you will need to have regular monitoring of your eyes. This involves yearly check-ups at your hospital clinic.

Some patients at higher risk of eye problems may be monitored every year, once they have been taking hydroxychloroquine for 1 year or more.

You should let your optician know that you're taking hydroxychloroquine. They may advise you to have a yearly check-up.

You should report any new eye symptoms to your doctor straight away.

If you develop any other new symptoms or there's anything else that concerns you after starting hydroxychloroquine, you should tell your doctor or healthcare team as soon as possible.

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 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

Hydroxychloroquine is commonly used alongside other disease-modifying drugs including methotrexate – especially for rheumatoid arthritis.

However, some drugs can interact with hydroxychloroquine. Some medicine for heart problems, diabetes and stomach ulcers may also interact with hydroxychloroquine.

Some indigestion remedies can stop it being absorbed. This includes antacids that you can buy over the counter. It's recommended you wait at least 4 hours after taking hydroxychloroquine before you take an indigestion remedy.

Discuss any new medications with your doctor or healthcare team before starting them, and always mention you're on hydroxychloroquine if you're treated by anyone other than your usual healthcare team.

Some types of antibiotics, called macrolides, may increase the risk of problems with the heart or circulation if taken while you're on hydroxychloroquine. These drugs, which include azithromycin, erythromycin and clarithromycin, won't usually be prescribed if you're already on hydroxychloroquine.

You can carry on taking a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) such as ibuprofen or naproxen, or a painkiller like paracetamol, unless your doctor advises otherwise.

Before taking any over-the-counter preparations or herbal remedies, discuss this first with your healthcare team.

Vaccinations

You can have vaccinations, including live vaccines such as yellow fever, while you're on hydroxychloroquine.

Even though hydroxychloroquine is an anti-malarial drug, don't assume it will protect you if you're travelling to an area where there's a risk of malaria. Always check with a healthcare professional what precautions you need to take against malaria.

Having an operation or dental treatment

If you're due to have an operation or dental treatment, talk to your surgeon and healthcare team about taking your hydroxychloroquine. It's likely you'll be advised to stop hydroxychloroquine for a time before and after surgery.

Alcohol

There's no known interaction between alcohol and hydroxychloroquine.

However, if you're also taking methotrexate, you should avoid alcohol, as methotrexate can interact with alcohol and affect your liver.



You can find out more about units of alcohol at [drinkaware.co.uk](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

Fertility, pregnancy and breastfeeding

If you're planning on trying for a baby, become pregnant or if you're thinking of breastfeeding, we suggest you discuss your medications with your rheumatologist.

There's no evidence to suggest that taking hydroxychloroquine reduces fertility in either men or women.

Current guidelines state that hydroxychloroquine can be taken safely during pregnancy and while breastfeeding, but this should be discussed with your doctor or healthcare team.

It's often best to continue with it to prevent a flare-up of your condition as the benefits usually outweigh any possible risks.

You can also breastfeed while you're on hydroxychloroquine. Hardly any of the drug passes into the breast milk and there's no evidence it has any effect on the baby.



This leaflet is a guide to hydroxychloroquine, 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](https://www.arthritis-uk.org)** to find out more

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!

A team of people helped us create this booklet. We would like to thank:

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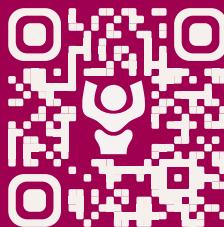
We would like to give a special thank you to Rebecca Judd and Julie Fry, who shared their opinions and thoughts on the booklet. Your feedback make sure the information we provide is relevant and suitable for everyone.



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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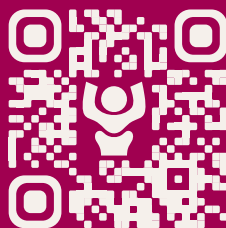
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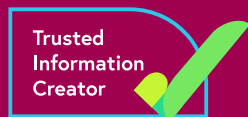


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Sign up today and we'll be in touch by email a few times a month with the latest arthritis news, including research and campaign updates, as well as tips and advice about how to live well with arthritis, and ways you can get involved.

arthritis-uk.org/signup

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