



## **HYDROXYCARBAMIDE (FORMERLY KNOWN AS HYDROXYUREA)**

### **What are the aims of this leaflet?**

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about hydroxycarbamide. It tells you what it is, how it works, how it is used to treat skin conditions, and where you can find out more about it.

### **What is hydroxycarbamide and how does it work?**

Hydroxycarbamide, formerly known as hydroxyurea, affects cells that are dividing rapidly, such as the skin cells in psoriasis and the blood cells in the bone marrow. It is mainly used for blood cancers but is also used to treat moderate to severe psoriasis.

### **How long has hydroxycarbamide been available?**

Hydroxycarbamide has been available for more than 30 years to treat psoriasis.

### **Which skin conditions are treated with hydroxycarbamide?**

Hydroxycarbamide is used occasionally for severe psoriasis that is not responding to the usual treatments.

### **How long will I need to take hydroxycarbamide before it has an effect?**

Most patients notice an improvement, which starts after a few weeks and reaches a maximum after 6-8 weeks.

### **How long will I need to take hydroxycarbamide?**

If it is found to be effective, hydroxycarbamide can be taken for months or years. The treatment must be monitored carefully.

### **What dose of hydroxycarbamide should I take?**

Your doctor will advise you. It is available in 500 mg capsules and you will usually be asked to take 1 to 3 capsules daily.

### **What are the possible side effects of hydroxycarbamide?**

Hydroxycarbamide occasionally causes important side effects:

- An increased risk of infection - report any illness. if you are in contact with chickenpox or shingles contact your doctor immediately
- Reduction of the blood count – anaemia and bleeding
- Hair loss
- Skin pigmentation (mild/yellow grey)
- Liver inflammation (rare)
- Kidney abnormality (rare)
- Drug reaction (drug-related lupus) - light sensitivity, muscle and joint pains
- Leg ulcer
- Gout

Stop the hydroxycarbamide and tell your doctor immediately if you develop any of the following:

- An infection
- A severe sore throat, fever or mouth ulcers
- Unexplained bruising or bleeding

### **How will I be monitored for the side effects of hydroxycarbamide treatment?**

Blood checks are very important to avoid side effects. Make sure you attend for these. Usually you need weekly visits until the dose is stabilised, and then every 1-3 months afterwards.

### **Does hydroxycarbamide affect fertility or pregnancy?**

You must not become pregnant or father a child whilst on hydroxycarbamide, and for at least 2 months after stopping treatment. You should not breast feed if you are taking hydroxycarbamide.

### **Can I take other medicines at the same time as hydroxycarbamide?**

Seek advice before taking any new medicine.

- Cytarabine must be avoided

- Combining hydroxycarbamide with other medications like methotrexate can result in suppression of the bone marrow and therefore requires close supervision
- Live vaccines must be avoided (inform your doctor or nurse that you are taking hydroxycarbamide prior to any vaccinations). See our leaflet on Immunisation ([www.bad.org.uk/site/881/default.aspx](http://www.bad.org.uk/site/881/default.aspx))

### **Where can I find out more about hydroxycarbamide?**

If you want to know more about hydroxycarbamide, or if you are worried about your treatment, you should speak to your doctor or pharmacist. This information sheet does not list all of the side effects of hydroxycarbamide. For fuller details, look at the drug information sheet which comes as an insert with your prescription for hydroxycarbamide.

**This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about the subject and is a consensus of the views held by representatives of the British Association of Dermatologists: its contents, however, may occasionally differ from the advice given to you by your doctor.**

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF DERMATOLOGISTS  
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