

## Peginterferon & Ribavirin Treatment

This leaflet aims to tell you about treatment for hepatitis C. You have an infection with the hepatitis C virus (HCV) which is damaging your liver. We feel you would benefit from treatment with a combination of two drugs – **Peginterferon** once a week by injection and **Ribavirin** tablets twice daily.

### What is Peginterferon?

Interferon is a substance which your body produces naturally when it comes into contact with any viral infection such as flu. The interferon treatment mimics the activity of natural interferon and helps the body to fight viruses. **Peginterferon** is one of the newer types of interferon and is classed as 'slow release' or 'long acting' and therefore only needs to be given once a week.

### How is Peginterferon given?

**Peginterferon** is given by injection once a week, under the skin using a small needle. You can either inject into your tummy or your thighs. It is usually painless. However, some people may experience a slight discomfort as they inject the fluid under the skin. You may experience some redness at the injection site, so it is important to vary the site to prevent it from becoming sore.

You will receive your first injection in clinic. The nurse will teach you or a family member how to give you your injections safely at home. Your course of treatment may last 24 weeks. Depending on their hepatitis C genotype and response some patients will need a shorter treatment. Please store your interferon in a fridge and use the disposable container to dispose of your needles and syringes. The nurse will dispose of the container for you if you return it when it is full.

### What is Ribavirin?

**Ribavirin** is an anti-viral drug and is given in combination with **Peginterferon**.

### How is Ribavirin given?

**Ribavirin** comes in tablets and is given by mouth **twice a day, allowing 12 hours between doses**. If you forget to take a dose, **miss it out** and carry on as prescribed. If it is **more than 4 hours** after the time it should be taken, that dose should be missed and you should carry on with the normal dosing schedule.

### Are there side-effects?

The most common side-effects of **Peginterferon** are fever, chills, headaches, muscle aches and pains plus fatigue. These are generally worse with the first few injections and gradually wear off after a few weeks. These effects can be reduced by taking the injections in the evening and by taking 2 Paracetamol tablets with each injection.

Other possible side-effects are loss of appetite and weight loss. Less common side-effects include mood changes, sleep disturbances, depression and thinning of hair. Your symptoms will be closely monitored by your nurse.



### Occurrence of Psychiatric side effects

These risks are for the general population and could be higher in patients with underlying mental health illness

### Pegylated Interferon with or without Ribavirin

Very common (1 in 10)

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Insomnia

Common (1 in 10 -1 in 100)

- Emotional disorders
- Mood alteration
- Aggression
- Nervousness
- Decreased Libido

Uncommon (1 in 1000 -1 in 10,000)

- Suicidal ideation
- Hallucinations

Rare (1 in 1000 -1 in 10,000)

- Suicide
- Psychotic disorder
- Substance overdose

### Drug Interactions

Interaction with Clozapine, Olanzapine reported with decrease in white blood cells during treatment. Interaction with Methadone has been reported leading to increased Methadone levels by 10-15%

The main side-effects of **Ribavirin** is that it may cause you to become anaemic. This may make you feel tired and sometimes short of breath. Less common side-effects include itching, skin rashes, cough and nausea. It is important to drink plenty of water. Please remember you will not experience all these side-effects, as like all medications.

### Pregnancy

Treatment with these drugs is not thought to be safe in pregnancy. **Ribavirin** has been shown to cause abnormalities in baby mice. It is therefore very important for women who could become pregnant to use two forms of reliable **contraception** whilst on treatment and for 4 months after the completion of treatment and for seven months after for males. Men whose partners are pregnant must use a condom to minimise delivery of ribavirin to their partner. Stop breast-feeding before starting treatment.

### What happens after I start treatment?

You will have various blood tests on your first visit and it is important to tell your doctor if you suffer from any other illness or are taking any medication. Once you are on treatment you will need to be followed up regularly to monitor any side-effects you may be experiencing and for blood tests at least at weeks 2, 4, 8 and 12 and monthly thereafter if all is well.

## Contact details

If you have any worries or need any more information please do not hesitate to discuss these concerns with your doctor or nurse.

**Gastroenterology Out patient Department**  
**Pilgrim Hospital**  
**Maxine Myers Hepatitis C Clinical Nurse Specialist**  
**01205 446899**  
**Dr S Jain Consultant Gastroenterologist**  
**01205 446081**

## Further support & information

### The Hepatitis C Trust

Confidential helpline: 0845 223 4424

Web: [www.hepctrust.org.uk](http://www.hepctrust.org.uk).

### Help Every Person C

Web: [www.helpeverypersonc.co.uk](http://www.helpeverypersonc.co.uk)

### British Liver Trust

Web: [www.britishlivertrust.org.uk](http://www.britishlivertrust.org.uk)

Information line: 0800 652 7330

General enquiries: 01425 481 320

### If you were infected with Hepatitis C due to treatment within the NHS prior to 1991 then contact:

The Skipton Fund

PO Box 50107

London

SW1H 0YF

Telephone: 020 7808 1160

Web: [www.skiptonfund.org](http://www.skiptonfund.org)

## References

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email [patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk)

The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.

If you require this information in another language, large print, audio (CD or tape) or braille, please email the Patient Information team at [patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk)