

Rituximab



What is rituximab?

- An immunosuppressant that is used to control symptoms and prevent flare-ups in diseases of the immune system such as vasculitis (inflammation in the blood vessels) or glomerulonephritis (inflammation of the kidneys).
- Rituximab lowers your body's harmful response to diseases of the immune system. It is often used with other medications, such as prednisone.
- Available as an injection (shot).

How do I use it?

- Given as an infusion into a vein over a period of time by a nurse.
- A blood test may be taken before each treatment. Do remember to have the blood work done, if scheduled, because the dose and timing of rituximab may be changed based on the test results and/or other side effects.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Call your doctor's office or kidney care clinic as soon as possible if you missed your scheduled infusion.
- It is very important to come for each rituximab infusion because missing even a few doses may cause flare-ups of symptoms. Mark the dates of your scheduled rituximab infusions on your calendar to avoid any missed doses and do all required blood work ahead of time so the test results can be reviewed by the doctor before you come for the infusion.

- The dose, frequency and duration of rituximab infusions are based on your weight and specific to your medical condition.

What side effects should I expect?

- Check your blood work regularly; this is important to detect and minimize the side effects of rituximab.
- Very rarely, some patients may be allergic to rituximab. Your doctor will order for you to take a mild pain medication (e.g. Tylenol), an antihistamine (e.g. Benadryl) or other medications before your infusion to decrease the allergic symptoms, if they arise. Some side effects are more common the first time you receive rituximab; therefore, the medication will be given more slowly during the first infusion.
- Your nurse will check on you regularly during your infusion. Report any flu-like symptoms to your nurse or doctor right away, such as headache, weakness, fever, shakes, aches, pains, nausea, diarrhea and sweating, or other symptoms such as dizziness, shortness of breath, chest tightness, swelling of face, throat, arms or legs, flushing, itching or a rash.
- Rituximab may decrease the production of white blood cells and cause low red blood cells and low platelets in the body. Contact your doctor if you notice any unusual tiredness, bleeding or easy bruising.
- Since rituximab lowers your body's ability to fight off infections, wash your hands often and stay away from people with infections, colds or flu. Contact your doctor right away if you feel you may have a cold or other infection, e.g. if you experience

high fever, chills, very bad sore throat, bad cough, chest congestion, pain with passing urine, etc.

- Very rarely, rituximab may also lower your body's ability to fight off a bad brain infection. Notify your doctor if you experience any confusion, dizziness or loss of balance, difficulty talking or walking, vision problems or seizures.

Drug interactions with rituximab

- You should discuss with your doctor or pharmacist before beginning any new medications (non-prescription and prescription), herbal products or vitamins.
- Do not receive any vaccines without talking to your doctor because the use with rituximab may either increase your chance of an infection or make the vaccine not work as well.

Is rituximab harmful during pregnancy?

- Rituximab readily crosses the placenta and we do not know if the medication is safe for the fetus.
- Rituximab should not be administered to pregnant women unless the possible benefits outweighs the potential risk.
- Birth control is recommended in women of child bearing potential.
- It is not certain whether rituximab is transferred into breast milk; therefore, breastfeeding is not recommended.

Reordering procedure

- To refill your medication, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

Biosimilar rituximab

- Biosimilar rituximabs are designed to be as safe and effective as the original biologic drug called Rituxan®.
- To be approved in Canada, a biosimilar

must be proven to have no clinically meaningful differences from the originator.

- BC Renal funds a biosimilar rituximab called Riximyo™. This drug has undergone rigorous testing for safety and effectiveness and is significantly less expensive than Rituxan. By funding this drug, BC Renal is able to reinvest savings into other treatments for patients with kidney disease.
- As with all medications, BC Renal will monitor its use and effectiveness over time.