

Cyclosporin for Eczema

Cyclosporin is a strong immune suppressant drug and is most commonly used to prevent the rejection of transplanted organs (eg. liver, kidneys, heart). It is also registered to treat severe eczema.

Mechanism of action

Cyclosporin reduces inflammation in the skin, by calming down certain immune cells (lymphocytes) which are overactive in eczema.

Cyclosporin is normally taken by patients with severe eczema for a minimum of several months and up to several years.

The dose is usually 2 - 5 mg/kg body weight per day. The solution or capsules (which should be swallowed whole with a glass of water) are taken at the same times each day after breakfast and dinner. It should not be taken with grapefruit juice as this may unpredictably increase the amount of cyclosporin absorbed into the blood stream.

Monitoring

Cyclosporin may have some serious side effects. It is essential to follow your doctor's advice regarding monitoring of your child's health. This is especially important when the medication is first prescribed, but some side effects become more likely after several months' treatment.

- Blood pressure will be measured one- to two-weekly for the first month, then monthly thereafter.
 - Kidney function will be tested by blood creatinine levels.
 - Other regular tests may include a full blood count and liver function tests.
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Drug Interactions

Certain medications should be avoided by patients on cyclosporin. If it is essential to receive treatment with one of these medications, you should ensure your health is monitored carefully by your doctor.

These medicines include;

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) eg. indomethacin, naproxen.
 - Antibiotics eg. cotrimoxazole, trimethoprim, rifampicin, erythromycin, ciprofloxacin, tobramycin, gentamicin.
 - Anti-epileptics eg. phenytoin, carbamazepine.
 - Antifungals eg. amphotericin B, ketoconazole, itraconazole, fluconazole.
 - St John's wort.
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Side Effects

Side-effects from cyclosporin may include:

- Hypertension (high blood pressure) which may require additional medication for control.

- A reduction in kidney function, which may necessitate reducing the dose of cyclosporin or occasionally stopping it.
- Increased hair growth.
- Loss of appetite and nausea.
- Paraesthesia (pins and needles sensation) in fingers, toes or lips.
- Tremor.
- Swollen or bleeding gums. Brush your teeth regularly and massage your gums with a soft toothbrush. Use dental floss daily, and attend for regular dental check-ups.
- Increased risk of bacterial, fungal or viral infections. See your doctor promptly if you feel unwell.
- Possible increased risk of cancer, particularly skin cancer. Protect yourself from sun exposure - wear covering clothing outdoors, and apply broad spectrum sunscreen to all exposed skin daily.
- If you are prescribed cyclosporin for your skin condition, discuss the side effects with your doctor. Make sure you understand what to expect, and how to deal with any problems.
- Once you have been prescribed cyclosporin the pharmacy will give you a consumer product information leaflet about Neoral (the brand name of cyclosporin) prepared by the manufacturer. Make sure you read this material as well.

Once the eczema has stabilised on cyclosporin, your doctor will advise you to slowly reduce the daily dose of the medication to the minimum which controls the disease. If side effects occur it may be necessary to stop it altogether for a few months to allow side effects to resolve. When cyclosporin is discontinued, the eczema may reappear.

Immunizations

Do not have any immunizations with live vaccines (measles, polio, chickenpox) without first checking with your doctor. Some vaccines may be less effective while you are taking Neoral. If your child contracts chicken pox you should notify your doctor and stop the cyclosporin.

If you have any concerns with your skin or its treatment, discuss this with your doctor.

(Adapted from DermNet a web site of the New Zealand Dermatological Society)