

Amiodarone Advice

This factsheet is intended to help those affected by atrial fibrillation understand the medication amiodarone, with a brief introduction to how it works, dosing and side effects.

Amiodarone is a medication that helps in the management of heart rhythm abnormalities. It is a very effective medication but can produce side effects which your doctor will need to monitor. Amiodarone is used to help keep the heart in its normal (sinus) rhythm. It is also used when the heart has changed its rhythm (arrhythmia) in order to help it return to normal rhythm.

Side Effects

Although generally well tolerated amiodarone does have side effects that can affect different parts of our body.

Skin

When taking amiodarone, the skin can take on a greyish/blue tinge. This will settle on stopping amiodarone but can take a long time.

While taking amiodarone, you may become more sensitive to sunburn. Using sunblock and hats appears to prevent this side effect. Because amiodarone remains in the body for a long time it may be necessary to continue using sun block for a few months after stopping the medication.

Thyroid Gland

The thyroid gland produces a hormone which controls the body's metabolism. Amiodarone can affect this gland making it both over active (this occurs in about 2% of people taking amiodarone) or under active (this occurs in about 6% of people taking amiodarone). Your doctor will take regular blood tests to check if either of these has developed. If you experience symptoms of extreme tiredness or restlessness you should contact your general practitioner to discuss this. Your doctor will arrange for you to have blood tests if these have not already been done.

Both an overactive and underactive thyroid can easily be treated with medications.

Eyes

Small deposits can form in the cornea of the eye (the clear surface that covers the pupil, iris and white of the eye). These deposits are not harmful although you may, however, notice the effect of these eye deposits if looking at bright lights at night time e.g. when driving a car. Of people taking amiodarone one in ten will notice a bluish halo around their vision. Again, this is not harmful.

Lungs

Amiodarone can cause problems with thickening (fibrosis) of some of the structures of the lungs. If you feel you have problems with shortness of breath you should arrange to see your general practitioner straight away.

Liver

Amiodarone can rarely cause problems with the function of the liver, which may be improved by reducing the dose of amiodarone. Your doctor will check for any effect on the liver by doing routine blood tests.

Monitoring

Amiodarone is a very useful medication and will only have been commenced in your best interest. The effects listed above, although not common, do mean that monitoring is important. You will need to be reviewed by your general practitioner every six months, whilst on amiodarone, and you will need blood tests to ensure that your thyroid and liver function are acceptable and that no other problems have developed, including any interaction with your INR level if taking warfarin.

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