

Adalimumab Therapy for Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Prepared by: Nova Scotia Collaborative IBD Program
Designed and Managed by: Library Services

QV85-1207 © March 2026 Nova Scotia Health Authority
To be reviewed March 2029 or sooner, if needed.
Learn more: <https://library.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources>

Adalimumab Therapy for IBD

Your inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) health care provider thinks that treatment with adalimumab may help you manage your IBD. This pamphlet has basic information about adalimumab. It can help you choose whether to use this treatment. It does not replace your IBD health care provider or pharmacist's instructions or information.

What is IBD?

- In IBD, your immune system cannot tell the difference between foreign (from outside your body) substances and your body's own tissues. This can cause:
 - › Bowel inflammation (swelling)
 - › Bowel ulcers (sores)
 - › Diarrhea (loose, watery poop)
 - › Pain
- IBD is usually treated with medications that:
 - › Lower inflammation
 - › Suppress (lower) the immune system

What is adalimumab?

- Adalimumab is a **biologic medication**. A biologic medication is a special medication that treats inflammation.

What should I do if I have side effects?

- If you have any serious side effects, or you have side effects that do not go away, tell your IBD health care provider right away. You may have to lower your dose (amount) or stop taking adalimumab. They will make changes to your medication, if needed.
- There are other medications that can help you manage the symptoms of these side effects.
- **It is important to talk with your IBD health care provider as soon as you have any changes in your side effects.** This will help you and your IBD health care provider pick the treatment that is best for you.
- **It is very important that your IBD health care provider checks your progress at regular visits to make sure this medication is working the right way.** You will also need regular blood tests. Talk to your IBD health care provider about when they will follow up with you by phone or in-person.

- When these people stopped taking adalimumab, their blood tests went back to normal and their SLE symptoms went away.
- Tell your IBD health care provider if you have any of these symptoms of SLE:
 - › Chest discomfort or pain
 - › Trouble breathing
 - › Joint pain
 - › Rash on your cheeks or arms that gets worse in the sun

Cancer

- A very small number of cases of lymphomas (blood cancers), including a cancer that can cause death, called hepatosplenic T-cell lymphoma, have been reported in people taking adalimumab.
- These types of cancers are thought to happen in about 6 out of every 10,000 people who take adalimumab. This risk may be higher if you are also taking other medications that affect or suppress your immune system.

- Tumour necrosis factor (TNF) is a part of your immune system involved in chronic (long term) inflammation. It is a big part of what causes your IBD symptoms.
- Adalimumab is an anti-TNF medication. It:
 - › Suppresses your immune system
 - › Lowers the inflammation in your bowel
 - › Improves your symptoms

How long will I need to take adalimumab?

- Adalimumab can take up to 4 months to work well. Your IBD health care provider will check how you are responding to the medication and decide if it is right for you.
- You can check if the medication is working by keeping a record of your IBD symptoms. Your IBD health care provider can also do the following tests:
 - › Stool (poop) sample
 - › Colonoscopy (scope of the bowel)
- Your IBD health care provider may want you to stay on adalimumab long term (years) to treat your IBD if:
 - › The medication is helping your IBD symptoms
 - › You are not having any major side effects

How much does adalimumab cost?

- Adalimumab can cost thousands of dollars a month.
- A Patient Support Program is available to help with the cost of this medication. They will work with your insurance company or Nova Scotia Pharmacare. Any part of the cost that is not covered by your insurance or Pharmacare may be paid for by the Patient Support Program.
- A nurse coordinator for the Patient Support Program will stay in contact with you and your IBD health care providers. They will help you with any forms that may be needed to cover the cost of this medication.

How do I use adalimumab?

- Adalimumab is injected using a needle, usually in the front of the thigh or belly. **It cannot be taken by mouth.**
- The medication is usually injected once every 14 days (2 weeks).
- Injection instructions are in the medication guide that comes with your adalimumab.
- The Patient Support Program will arrange for an IBD health care provider to teach you how to inject the medication. **Do not try to inject this medication on your own until you have learned how.**

- Some patients on adalimumab have had infections. These range from a cold to more serious infections which could cause death, like:
 - › Pneumonia
 - › Tuberculosis (TB)
 - › Other bacterial, fungal, and viral infections
- **If you think you have an infection, visit your primary health care provider or go to a walk-in clinic. It is important to tell them that you are taking adalimumab.**
- If you get an infection while taking adalimumab, tell your IBD health care provider. They will tell you if you should delay your adalimumab treatment and when you should start it again. If the infection becomes serious, your treatment may be stopped.

Are there any other risks of taking this medication?

Symptoms of lupus (systemic lupus erythematosus [SLE])

- A small number of people on adalimumab have had symptoms of SLE. These people had abnormal blood test results with autoantibodies (antibodies that attack your own body).

• **Tell your IBD health care provider right away if you have any of these symptoms related to congestive heart failure (CHF):**

- › Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- › Sudden weight gain
- › Swelling in your face, fingers, lower legs, or feet

Call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away if you suddenly have any of these symptoms:

- › Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- › Chest pain
- › Swelling in your face, throat, legs, or feet
- › Anaphylaxis (a life-threatening allergic reaction where you stop breathing)

Higher risk of infection

- Anti-TNF medications like adalimumab work by lowering the immune responses that cause your IBD symptoms, but they also lower other immune responses. This means you may have a higher risk of infection.

There is a very small chance of getting an infection that could cause death.

Before you start taking adalimumab

- Before taking adalimumab, there are things you can do to lower your risks and help the treatment work better.
- You will have tests to check for active infections, like:
 - › Blood tests
 - › A tuberculosis (TB) skin or blood test
 - › A chest X-ray
- Your IBD health care provider may want you to update your vaccines for:
 - › Tetanus
 - › Shingles
 - › Pneumonia (lung infection)
 - › Hepatitis
- **If you have other health problems, they may get worse while taking adalimumab. Tell your IBD health care provider about any other health problems you have, like:**
 - › Allergies to certain medications
 - › Chronic or recurrent (keep coming back) infections
 - › Blood conditions
 - › History of or exposure to TB
 - › Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
 - › Active cancer or a history of cancer
 - › Congestive heart failure (CHF)

- **Do not get any live vaccines (vaccines that have a weakened form of a virus in them, like MMR) while taking adalimumab.** You are at a higher risk of infection from the virus.
- If you are due for vaccines or plan to be vaccinated, tell your IBD health care provider. It is safe to get the yearly influenza vaccine (flu shot) and COVID vaccines while taking adalimumab.
- **Do not start taking any new medications.** Medication interactions (how they affect each other) may increase the risk of serious side effects. **Ask your IBD health care provider or pharmacist about possible complications before starting a new medication.**
- Have regular blood tests and regular check-ups with your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner).
- **It is important to tell your IBD health care provider if you are, or are trying to get, pregnant.** Tests have **not** shown any harmful effects on pregnancy while taking adalimumab.
- Adalimumab **does not** pass into your breast milk, so it is safe to breastfeed or chestfeed your baby.

What are the possible side effects of adalimumab?

- Like any medication, adalimumab has possible side effects. These include:
 - › Redness at the injection site (where the needle is put in)
 - › Swelling
 - › Bruising
 - › Sinus infection
 - › Headache
 - › Nausea (upset stomach)
- **Tell your health care provider if you have any of these side effects:**
 - › Stomach (belly) fullness
 - › Body and/or muscle aches or pains
 - › Cough or hoarseness (raspy voice)
 - › Ear and/or nose congestion (stuffiness)
 - › Feeling light-headed
 - › Fast, shallow breathing
 - › Chills
 - › Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
 - › Weight loss
 - › Loss of body fat and/or muscle