

Rituximab for Non-Malignant Conditions

Benign Medical Day Unit
Victoria General Site, QEII

Notes:

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Rituximab for Non-Malignant Conditions

What is rituximab (ri-TUX-i-mab)?

- Rituximab is a type of medication called a **monoclonal antibody**. These antibodies are created in a lab and help fight diseases.
- It is also an immunosuppressant (a medication that lowers your body's harmful response to immune system diseases).
- Rituximab can be used to treat many non-malignant (not cancer) autoimmune-mediated or immune-mediated diseases. These diseases happen when your immune system mistakes its healthy cells as foreign and attacks them.

How do I take rituximab?

- Rituximab is a liquid. It is given through an intravenous (I.V.) inserted (put) into a vein in your arm using a needle.

Is rituximab safe during pregnancy and when breastfeeding?

- Rituximab can affect a fetus. Talk with your health care team about the risks before taking rituximab if you are pregnant or planning to get pregnant.
- It is **not** recommended to breastfeed or chestfeed while taking this medication. If you have questions about this, talk with your health care provider.

What are your questions?

Please ask a member of your health care team. We are here to help you.

What else do I need to know?

- Rituximab can interact with (affect) some medications and affect how well they work. **It is important to talk with your health care team before starting any new medications, including over-the-counter medications, supplements, or natural products.**
 - › Ask your health care provider:
 - › When to get certain vaccines. Some vaccines will not work as well for 6 to 9 months after treatment
 - › If there are any vaccines you should get to protect yourself while taking this medication
 - Rituximab can make you dizzy. Alcohol and cannabis can also make you dizzy. Talk with your health care team if you drink alcohol or use cannabis.

What will happen before my treatment?

- You will have blood work to check your immune system and organ function (how well your organs work).
- You will meet with your health care provider and they will prescribe rituximab.
- You will get an appointment for the Benign Medical Day Unit, 4th floor of the Victoria Building.

You will need someone to bring you to and pick you up from your first appointment. If this is not possible, please tell a member of your health care team as soon as you can.

- Please drink plenty of fluids the day before your appointment. This will help you to be hydrated (have enough fluids) and help the nurse insert your I.V. line.

On the day of your treatment:

- If you take blood pressure medication (like amlodipine, hydrochlorothiazide, ramipril), your health care provider may tell you not to take it on the morning of your appointment. You can take it after your appointment.
- Drink plenty of fluids and eat a healthy meal before your appointment.
- Since you will be sitting in the clinic for a long time, we suggest wearing comfortable clothes.
- You may wish to bring items to pass the time (like a book, a puzzle, smart devices with headphones).

What will happen during the treatment?

- Your appointment for your first dose (amount) of rituximab can take up to 6 hours. Each appointment after that can take up to 4 to 5 hours.
- Your health care team will monitor you closely during your infusion. They will check your vital signs (blood pressure, heart rate, oxygen level, and temperature) often.

- Although it is very rare, rituximab may make it harder for your body to fight off a brain infection called **progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML)**. Tell your **health care team or get help right away if you have:**

- › Confusion, dizziness, or loss of balance
- › Trouble talking or walking
- › Vision (seeing) problems
- › Seizures (abnormal electrical brain activity that can cause changes in how you behave, move, or feel)

How will I know if the medication is working?

- You will have regular blood work while taking this medication. This is to check how your body is responding to rituximab and can also be used to check for side effects.
- Once the medication has started working, you may have less symptoms.

If you have any of the symptoms on page 6 after leaving your appointment, go to the nearest Emergency Department right away. Make sure you tell the health care team that you think you might be having a medication reaction.

- A member of your health care team will insert an I.V. needle into a vein in your arm. The medication will be given through the I.V.
- **Tell your nurse if you do not feel well at any time during your appointment.**

How often will I need treatment?

- You may need to get rituximab:
 - › 1 time a week for 4 weeks
 - › 2 times, 14 days (2 weeks) apartThis will depend on why you are taking rituximab.
- You may need more doses in the future to help treat and control your condition. The most common amount of time between treatments is 6 months, but this is different for each person. It will depend on how you respond to the medication. Your health care provider will talk about this with you.

Rituximab-related side effects:

- Rituximab may lower your white blood cells (cells that fight infection), red blood cells (cells that carry oxygen), or platelets (cells that help your blood clot). We will check these levels as part of your regular blood work. **Tell your health care provider if you have bruising or bleeding.**
- Since rituximab suppresses (lowers) your immune system, it is less able to fight infections. This means you are at a higher risk of getting an infection. To avoid getting an infection:
 - › Wash your hands often.
 - › Avoid close contact with anyone who is sick.
 - › Consider wearing a face mask if you are in a high-risk setting (a very crowded or confined place, like an airplane).

What are the possible side effects?

Infusion-related side effects

- You may have an allergic reaction to the medication. This is rare.
 - › We will give you Tylenol® and Benadryl® before your first infusion to help prevent infusion-related reactions. Your health care provider may also order a small dose of I.V. steroids, if needed.
 - › We will give your first infusion more slowly so we can closely monitor for any allergy symptoms.

Please tell your nurse if you have had a reaction to rituximab in the past.

Tell your nurse if you have any of these symptoms:

- › Soreness around the I.V. site (where the I.V. needle entered your skin)
- › Headache
- › Fatigue (feeling very tired)
- › Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
- › Chills
- › Aches or pains
- › Nausea (upset stomach)
- › Diarrhea (loose, watery poop)
- › Sweating
- › Flushing (feeling warm)
- › Itching

Tell your nurse right away if you feel anything different once the infusion starts, especially if you have more serious side effects, like:

- › Trouble breathing
- › Chest tightness
- › Swelling of your face, mouth, tongue, or throat
- › Skin rash or hives
- › Dizziness or feeling faint
- › Weakness
- › Numbness or tingling of your arms or legs