

Patient Education: Orencia® (abatacept)

Drug Information:

Abatacept (ab-a-TA-sept) is a medication used to treat moderate to severe rheumatoid arthritis. It is available by prescription only. The brand name is Orencia (oh-REN-see-ah). It is available as an intravenous (IV) infusion and a self-administered subcutaneous (SQ) syringe.

Uses of this medication:

Abatacept is approved for treatment of moderate to severe rheumatoid arthritis in adults. It helps relieve the pain and joint inflammation. It is used when other medications did not help your rheumatoid arthritis.

Who should NOT receive this medication?

You should avoid this medication if you have had an allergic reaction to abatacept. Inform your doctor if you have asthma, cancer, cystic fibrosis, immune disorders, diabetes, emphysema, infection, smoke tobacco products, tuberculosis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Patients with rheumatoid arthritis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease should be monitored while on abatacept for worsening of their respiratory disease. Avoid vaccination by live vaccine, such as intra-nasal flu vaccine or the shingles vaccine, unless instructed to by your doctor.

What I should know before starting this medication:

Abatacept can weaken your immune system, causing you to have a greater chance of getting an infection. If you have a history of getting infections or currently have an open cut or sore, or even the flu, talk to your doctor before starting abatacept. Before you start abatacept have your doctor perform a tuberculosis test. Make sure you notify your doctor if you had tuberculosis in the past, tested positive for tuberculosis, or even if you were in contact with another person who had tuberculosis.

How does this medication work?

Your immune system protects your body against infections that are caused by bacteria and viruses and leaves healthy body tissue alone. In patients who have rheumatoid arthritis your immune system attacks normal body tissue causing the inflammation in your joints. By taking abatacept it will decrease the immune system's attack on normal tissues which will reduce pain and joint inflammation and even slow damage to your bones. Abatacept is different than other biologics because it inhibits T lymphocyte that is found in your synovium fluid.

How should I take this medication?

IV: Abatacept is infused into the vein of your arm. It is administered in a hospital or clinic setting by a health care professional. It is usually infused over 30 minutes. During the first month, it is given every 2 weeks, then every 4 weeks thereafter.

SQ: Abatacept may be self-administered. If you are just starting abatacept there will be an initial IV infusion (see above) for the first dose. Twenty-four hours after the IV infusion, a subcutaneous (SQ) injection of abatacept is administered. You may then begin once weekly administration of abatacept. If you have been on IV infusions of abatacept then the next IV infusion may be replaced by a SQ administration. Your doctor will help you decide which option is best for you. Before giving the SQ injections make sure to warm up the syringe to room temperature. Do not microwave the medication. You should give the injection into your thigh or abdomen. Make sure to rotate sites weekly. Clean the area you plan on injecting with an alcohol wipe. Do not inject into bruised, red or damaged skin. As with all medications, make sure to check that it is the correct drug and that it is not expired.

How to store this medication:

SQ: Abatacept for SQ self-injection should be stored in the refrigerator until you are ready to use it. Do not allow the medication to freeze. If the medication freezes or is left out in the heat (ex: in a car on a hot day), dispose of the syringe. Remember to let the drug reach room temperature before injection.

What are the side effects of this medication?

The more common side effects experienced include headache, upper respiratory tract infection, sore throat, and nausea.

In addition, you may have some irritation at the site of injection with the use of the SQ abatacept. Since abatacept affects the immune system it can cause some more serious side effects. Make sure you contact your doctor immediately if you experience any of the following: if you develop pneumonia, flu, or if you have any reaction such as hives, swollen face, eyelids, lips, tongue, throat, or trouble breathing.

Are there any drugs or foods that interact with this medication?

Make sure your prescriber knows about ALL prescription, over-the-counter, and dietary supplements you may be taking before you start treatment with abatacept. It is not recommended to take other biologic immunosuppressing agents like TNF blocker medications (Enbrel, Humira, Remicade, Cimzia, Simponi) or anakinra (Kineret) while taking abatacept.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

IV: It is important not to miss a dose. Call your doctor or health care professional if you are unable to keep an appointment. Make sure you schedule another appointment.

SQ: If a dose is missed take it as soon as you remember. It is important to remember to take your medication and not miss a dose as this may cause flares. If you have any questions please feel free to contact the office.

What should I monitor?

Make sure you supply your doctor with all recent blood results, if not taken in the office. Watch for any infections that occur during the treatments. Monitor and document any tender or swollen joints, morning stiffness, or pain and show you doctor at every visit.

What if I am pregnant or breast feeding?

Make sure you tell your doctor if you are pregnant, become pregnant, or if you are thinking about becoming pregnant. Abatacept has not been studied in pregnant women or nursing mothers. Abatacept should be given to a pregnant woman only if clearly needed.

Specific information from your prescriber:

If you have any further questions please feel free to call our Albany office at (518) 489-4471 or our Saratoga office at (518) 584-4953.

For additional information we recommend the following resources:

The Arthritis Foundation: <http://www.arthritis.org>

References

1. Abatacept. In: Clinical Pharmacology [database on the Internet]. Tampa (FL): Gold Standard; 2012 [updated 4 Nov 2011; cited 18 Jun 2013]. Available from: www.clinicalpharmacology.com. subscription required to view.
2. Abatacept. In: Lexi-Drugs Online [database on the Internet]. Hudson (OH): Lexi-Comp, Inc.; 2012 [cited 18 Jun 2013]. Available from: <http://online.lexi.com>. subscription required to view.
3. Orencia (abatacept) [package insert]. Princeton (NJ): Bristol-Myers Squibb; 2011.