

Patient Information Sheet

Human antibody to tumor necrosis factor (anti-TNF) (Adalimumab) for Inflammatory Bowel Disease (brand name = Humira™)

What is tumor necrosis factor (TNF)?

Tumor necrosis factor is a protein that circulates in the body naturally. It is used by the body to fight infection by causing an inflammation response. In inflammatory bowel disease, the body appears to produce too much TNF which can damage the intestine.

What is human antibody to TNF (adalimumab)?

Adalimumab is a genetically engineered medication designed to “soak up” the extra TNF that circulates in the body. It binds specifically to TNF to neutralize its function. Although the medication uses a fully human protein, other components may still cause an allergic reaction or a localized injection site reaction.

When is antibody to TNF (adalimumab) used?

Adalimumab works very well in approximately 60% to 80% of inflammatory bowel disease patients. The medication is most effective in patients whose disease has not responded to standard medications, such as 5-ASA products, prednisone or immunosuppressive treatments (azathioprine or methotrexate). Adalimumab is not a cure but it can induce remission and, when given over the longterm, maintain remission of inflammatory bowel disease.

How is antibody to TNF (adalimumab) given?

Adalimumab is administered as a subcutaneous injection given either every two weeks or every week. Your IBD health practitioner will determine which dose interval is best for you. If adalimumab is effective in a patient with inflammatory bowel disease, he or she may be prescribed it indefinitely for maintenance purposes.

What are the side effects of antibody to TNF (adalimumab)?

The major short-term side effects are flu-like symptoms. If you have been exposed to tuberculosis in the past, the use of adalimumab may reactivate this infection. To reduce the risk of this happening, prior to starting adalimumab, you will have a chest x-ray and skin test for TB. Patients receiving adalimumab are at increased risk for infections. Any signs of fever should be reported to your IBD health practitioner promptly. Some patients may experience a localized injection site reaction (redness, rash, swelling, itching, or bruising).

Can I get cancer from this drug?

Like any drug that affects the immune system, there is a very remote risk of developing a lymph gland tumor (lymphoma). Ask your IBD health practitioner to explain this. To minimize this risk, you will undergo regular screening for lymphoma.

Do I need to get any blood tests while I am receiving antibody to TNF (adalimumab)?

Yes, your IBD health practitioner will request monthly blood tests while taking this medication. Regular follow-up visits will also be arranged to discuss progress and concerns with your IBD health practitioner.

What is the cost of antibody to TNF (adalimumab)?

Adalimumab is a new class of genetically engineered medications and it is extremely expensive to produce. The cost will depend on your body weight and how much of the medication you require. You will need to have an insurance company help you pay for this medication. If you do not have private benefits, the IBD nurse will help you arrange Alberta Health Non-Group Coverage.