

Patient Information Sheet

Antibody to tumour necrosis factor (anti-TNF) (Infliximab) for Inflammatory Bowel Disease (brand name = Remicade®)

What is tumour necrosis factor (TNF)?

Tumour necrosis factor is a protein that circulates in our 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 antibody to TNF (infliximab)?

Infliximab is an antibody designed to “soak up” the extra TNF that circulates in the body. It binds specifically to TNF to neutralize its function. The infliximab antibody is genetically engineered and consists of two parts: a mouse protein and a human protein. Because it is not completely human, there is a possibility of a mild, temporary allergic reaction when the drug is given.

When is antibody to TNF (Infliximab) used?

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

How is antibody to TNF (Infliximab) given?

Infliximab can only be given intravenously during a 1 to 2 hour infusion. Generally, infliximab is initially given every 2 months. If infliximab 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 (infliximab)?

The major short-term side effects are flu-like symptoms. If you have been exposed to tuberculosis in the past, the use of infliximab may reactivate this infection. To reduce the risk of this happening, prior to starting infliximab, you will have a chest x-ray and skin test for TB. Patients receiving infliximab are at increased risk for infections. Any signs of fever should be reported to your IBD health practitioner promptly. Because infliximab is a mouse/human antibody, it is possible to develop an allergic reaction to it.

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 (infliximab)?

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 (infliximab)?

Infliximab 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.