

Before starting treatment you will have some baseline blood tests.

You should be aware that beta interferon is a long term treatment. The guidelines from the Association of British Neurologists also include criteria for stopping the treatment. Again, The Department of Health has adopted this as best practice for the NHS.

The Consultant will stop the treatment if:

- Beta Interferon is no longer effective. For example, if relapses became more frequent
- If a person lost the ability to walk for more than six months
- The medical advice would be to stop taking beta interferon at least three months prior to becoming pregnant. A person would be able to restart beta interferon once they were no longer pregnant or had stopped breast feeding

Women should not become pregnant while receiving beta interferon. There is a risk of miscarriage and it is unknown how beta interferon might effect the development of the baby.

Monitoring your health while taking beta interferon

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital will arrange for the drug to be delivered to an address of your choice. You will also receive injection technique training.

Following commencement of treatment you will have regular blood tests. For some people they may also have their blood monitored for neutralising antibodies.

You will have regular appointments with the Consultant Neurologist and the MS Specialist Nurse. This will mean that you will need to come to Gloucester Royal Hospital Neurology Outpatient Department every three months throughout the whole time that you receive beta interferon.

For further information

Please contact the MS Specialist Nurse.

Your MS Specialist Nurses:

Richard Warner (RN)

Del Thomas (RN)

Tel: 08454 226404

Answer machine available

Disease modifying therapies for people with Multiple Sclerosis Beta Interferon

Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide information about the use of beta interferon for people with relapsing multiple sclerosis.

Interferons are chemicals that are found naturally in the body. They act as messengers and play a vital role in the functioning of the immune system.

It is thought that beta-interferon alters the person's immune response that is responsible for the destruction of myelin.

There are currently three beta-interferon Products that are licensed in the UK for the treatment of MS:

- **Avonex**, beta-interferon 1a, once per week Intra-muscular injection
- **Betaferon**, beta-interferon 1b, every other day Subcutaneous injection
- **Rebif**, beta-interferon 1a, three times per week Subcutaneous injection

What are the benefits of the drug?

Clinical trials have found that Beta-Interferon is a useful treatment for people who are experiencing frequent attacks or relapses of their MS. The research suggests that the drug will reduce the number of relapses/attacks of MS symptoms by approximately one third. By using MRI scans the research has also shown that beta

interferon causes a significant reduction in the number of MS lesions seen within the nervous system(2).

- There is some research evidence to suggest that **BetaFeron** may be slightly more effective than **Avonex** in reducing the relapsing rate of people
- However, **BetaFeron** may place a person at a greater risk of developing neutralising antibodies. Neutralising antibodies could, potentially, limit the effect of beta interferon
- There is a debate amongst Consultant Neurologists about whether Beta Interferon would limit the amount of permanent problems a person with MS might acquire throughout their lifetime

What are the side effects?

All drugs have potential side effects. The majority of patients taking Beta-Interferon experience side effects in the first few months of treatment. However these tend to reduce as time goes by. The more common side effects are:

- Flu like symptoms
- Temporary worsening in MS symptoms immediately after injection
- Soreness around the Injection site

Some of these more common side effects can be limited by injecting at night time, taking paracetamol when injecting and ensuring that you rotate between injection

sites. However more uncommon side effects include:

- Changes to the numbers of white cells that make up a person's blood
- Changes in the function of a person's liver

A very rare side effect would be that the person experiences depression. If you felt that your mood was changing then you should report this to the Consultant. Help is available to support people with depression.

Before starting beta interferon

The Consultant will:

- Assess you to see whether it is clinically appropriate for you to receive Beta-Interferon according to guidelines from the Association of British Neurologists. The Department of Health has adopted this as best practice for the NHS
- Discuss with you treatment benefits and possible side effects
- Discuss with you the requirement of the Department of Health to collect data about your clinical experience of beta interferon
- Discuss the medical benefits of **Avonex** and **BetaFeron**
- Discuss with you how injecting yourself might affect your lifestyle