Abatacept (Orencia®)

How does it work?

- Abatacept is a “biologic” medicine that helps keep the immune system from attacking healthy tissues in the body by blocking the T cells from being turned on.

- Abatacept is used to treat Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)

- In people with RA, the body’s immune system mistakes certain normal cells in the body as foreign invaders. The immune cells get turned on and begin attacking healthy body tissues causing pain and swelling (inflammation) of joints and other tissues. Damage to joints and tissues will occur if RA is not treated with medicine.

Why take it?

- Abatacept has been ordered by the doctor to help manage your arthritis. Abatacept is generally used alone or in combination with other medicines to help
  - reduce the number of swollen & painful joints
  - reduce how long you have joint stiffness in the morning
  - reduce how tired you feel
  - increase your ability to move joints & do daily activities
  - slow or even prevent damage to your joints.

How quickly does it work?

- Decreased swelling, pain and stiffness, increased energy and your ability to move better may take as long as 1 – 4 months after receiving Abatacept.

How do I take it?

Abatacept is taken by self-injection or by intravenous infusion.

Self Injection

- Abatacept in a pre-loaded syringe can be injected into your abdomen or thigh one day a week (eg: every Tuesday).
- Each preloaded syringe is 125 mg

or
IV (Intravenous) Injection

- You can have an IV infusion done in a clinic or in your home. A nurse will place a needle in a vein in your arm and you will receive the infusion over ½ hour. The preparation, infusion & observation period after the infusion may take 1 – 1½ hours.
- Each vial of Abatacept contains 250 mg. Each infusion of Abatacept is 500 to 1000 mgs based on your body weight.
- Abatacept infusions are done at:
  - Week 0 - first infusion
  - Week 2 – second infusion
  - Week 4 – third infusion
- then the infusions are done every 4 weeks to control swelling (inflammation) in the body.

Develop a plan for having your infusions:

- Mark your infusion dates on a calendar ahead of time.
- Do your blood work one week before your infusion.
- Order your medication from the pharmacy one week prior.
- Ensure you have transportation to the clinic.
- Wear comfortable clothing, bring a snack and a book.
- If you forget to go to your appointment, feel unwell or have any concerns before the infusion, contact the clinic nurse.

Take your medicine as instructed by your doctor.

- Methotrexate or another DMARD (Disease Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drug) is generally taken with Abatacept to increase the effect of the medicine.
- Work with your doctor to decide how much medicine you need to control your arthritis. Taking more medicine than is recommended increases your risk of side effects. Skipping doses of medicine will reduce how well it will work in your body to control the swelling & pain of arthritis.
- Once you are feeling better on Abatacept, you must continue to take your other medicines, unless advised otherwise by your doctor.
**What tests are needed?**

**Blood tests:**

Prior to starting Abatacept, the following tests are done:

- Blood tests
- TB skin test
- Chest X-ray

- Do blood tests as ordered by your doctor every 1 – 2 months before your injection or infusion.
  - CBC (Complete Blood Count), liver enzymes, kidney test (creatinine) and measures of inflammation (ESR/CRP)
- A hepatitis blood screening test will be done before starting Abatacept

**What are the possible side effects?**

Like all medicines that effect the immune system, Abatacept can cause side effects, some of which may be serious.

**Possible side effects**

- headache
- sore throat
- upper respiratory infections
- nausea or diarrhea
- flushing of skin, or rash
- redness or itching at the injection site

**Rare Serious Side Effects**

**Infusion reactions:**

- Some patients may react to Abatacept during or shortly after the first infusion.
- If reactions occur, your symptoms will be treated immediately with other medicines as needed.

**Infections**

- pneumonia (lung infection)
- bronchitis (lung infection)
- TB (tuberculosis)
- skin infection (cellulitis)
- urinary tract infections
- kidney infection (pyelonephritis)
**What if I have a side effect?**

Contact your doctor or nurse if you develop any symptoms:
- These symptoms can occur any time while taking Abatacept and often don’t last long.
- If needed until symptoms go away, Abatacept may be stopped or the dosage reduced. An increase in blood & other tests may be done.

**Treat delayed allergic type reactions:**
(flushing, itching, rash, hives or shortness of breath)
- Take Benadryl 25 – 50 mg every 4 to 6 hours as needed.
- Anti-itch creams (Benadryl, Alveeno or Hydrocortisone .05%) are also available for rashes.

**Go to the emergency department immediately if you have:**
- shortness of breath
- chest tightness/pressure
- swelling of lips, tongue or throat
- or any other serious concern

**Infections:**
- There is an increased risk of serious infections associated with the use of Abatacept. Any infections or fevers should be taken seriously & reviewed by your doctor.
- Do not take Abatacept if you suspect you have an infection or are being treated for an infection.

**What if I get sick?**

**Infections:**
- There is an increased risk of serious infections associated with the use of Abatacept. Any infections or fevers should be taken seriously & reviewed by your doctor.
- Do not take Abatacept if you suspect you have an infection or are being treated for an infection.

**What if I need surgery?**

**Surgery, dental work or other procedures:**
- Develop a plan with your doctor for upcoming procedures. It will be necessary to stop Abatacept 2 – 4 weeks before the surgery.
- It is important that Abatacept is not given again until the incision is healed with no open wounds or signs of infection.

**Precautions?**

**Abatacept should not be taken if you:**
- have had a previous serious reaction to Abatacept.
- have an active infection.
- are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding.
- have COPD (chronic obstructive lung disease).
Vaccines:
- No live vaccines should be taken while on Abatacept or for 3 months after stopping the medicine.
- Do not take flu & pneumovax vaccines within 14 days before or after receiving Abatacept infusions.

Monitoring Blood Glucose Levels With Diabetes:
- Abatacept contains maltose which is a sugar that can cause high blood glucose readings during the infusion.

How do I storage it?
- Refrigerate the medication at 2 - 8ºC. Do not freeze.
- Carry Abatacept in a case with an icepack when travelling.

Syringe Disposal?
- Discard the syringe after each injection into a sharps plastic container from your pharmacist.
- Check with the local pharmacy to see if they will discard used syringes.

How often will I see my doctor?
1. See your rheumatologist after starting abatacept every 3 to 6 months as advised. These visits allow you & your doctor to assess how well your medicines are working to manage your arthritis, any changes needed in your medicines, and to reapply for provincial coverage as needed.
2. Keep a diary.
   Record when you take your medicines, any side effects & any reasons for changes or withdrawal of medicines.
3. Keep a medication list in your wallet.
   Record all medications, vitamin/mineral & herbal supplements you are presently taking & any allergies you may have.
   Bring this list to all medical appointments with doctors, etc.

What if I take a trip?
- Carry a travel letter from your doctor or clinic when travelling with injectable medicine & needles. List the medicine name & how much you are taking.
- Take extra medicine & a prescription in a carry on bag.
Abatacept Support Line:

- Orecio Response Program 1-877-979-3200
  
  • A service that helps you find a way to cover the cost of Abatacept, and planning of your injections or infusions.

Disclaimer:

This handout is to help you make an informed choice in your medical care. Specific questions about medications should be discussed with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Developed: January 2009  Last revised: April 2017
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