

Experts in Skin & Hair

Patient Information Leaflet: Systemic Treatments for Severe Eczema

What is Eczema?

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a chronic inflammatory skin condition characterised by itchy, dry, and inflamed skin. For some individuals, eczema can be severe and resistant to topical treatments, necessitating systemic therapies that target the broader immune response.

When Are Systemic Treatments Used?

Systemic treatments are typically recommended for individuals with moderate to severe eczema who:

- Have not responded adequately to topical therapies.
- Experience significant symptoms that impair daily functioning or quality of life.
- Have frequent flare-ups or persistent eczema despite additional management efforts.

Types of Systemic Treatments:

1. Oral Corticosteroids:

- **What They Are:** Medications like prednisolone that reduce inflammation and suppress the immune system.
- **How They Work:** Corticosteroids quickly relieve symptoms during acute eczema flare-ups by decreasing inflammation.
- **Considerations:** These medications are often used for short bursts due to potential side effects, including weight gain, mood changes, and long-term effects like osteoporosis.

2. Immunosuppressants:

- **Common Medications:**
 - **Methotrexate:** A drug that reduces immune system activity and inflammation.
 - **Azathioprine:** Suppresses the immune response and helps control symptoms.
 - **Ciclosporin:** An agent that inhibits T-cell activation and reduces inflammation.
- **How They Work:** These medications target the underlying immune dysregulation associated with eczema.
- **Considerations:** Regular monitoring is essential to detect potential side effects, such as liver toxicity or infection risk.

3. Biologic Therapies:

- **Common Medications:**
 - **Dupilumab (Dupixent):** A monoclonal antibody that targets specific pathways in the immune system (IL-4 and IL-13) involved in eczema.
- **How They Work:** Biologics are designed to specifically target the immune response pathways that contribute to eczema, leading to reduced inflammation and improved skin health.
- **Considerations:** Administered via injection every two weeks, they usually have fewer side effects than traditional immunosuppressants.

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4. Janus Kinase (JAK) Inhibitors:

- **Common Medications:** Abrocitinib, Upadacitinib and Baricitinib are examples of oral medications that block specific pathways in the immune response.
- **How They Work:** These medications help control inflammation by inhibiting key enzymes involved in the inflammatory process.
- **Considerations:** These treatments may require monitoring for side effects, including potential infections or changes in blood counts.

Managing Systemic Treatment:

- **Regular Follow-Ups:** Due to the potential side effects associated with systemic treatments, regular appointments with your consultant are crucial for monitoring your health and adjusting medications as needed.
- **Lifestyle Modifications:** Implement good skin care routines and identify triggers to help minimise flare-ups even when using systemic treatments.

Possible Side Effects:

While systemic treatments can be effective, they may also have side effects that need to be monitored:

- **Infections:** As systemic treatments may suppress the immune system.
- **Gastrointestinal Issues:** Such as nausea or diarrhoea.
- **Blood Tests:** Routine blood work may be required for monitoring liver function, kidney function, and blood cell counts depending on the medication used.

When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If you experience worsening symptoms despite treatment.
- If you notice signs of potential side effects, such as unusual fatigue, jaundice, or fever.
- If you have concerns about your medication or wish to discuss changes with your healthcare provider.

Conclusion:

Systemic treatments can provide significant relief for individuals with severe eczema who do not respond adequately to topical treatments. Collaborating closely with your dermatologist to develop a comprehensive treatment plan is key to effectively managing your condition.

For any questions or concerns regarding systemic treatments for eczema, please consult your dermatologist.

