

### Can I start a family or breastfeed?

- Use of hydroxychloroquine is generally safe during pregnancy. However if you are pregnant or planning to have a child, it is still advisable to discuss it with your doctor before you begin the treatment.
- For mothers receiving hydroxychloroquine, breastfeeding is safe.

### How should I store the medicine?

- Keep the tablets away from heat, moisture and direct sunlight.
- Keep all medicines out of reach of children.

## In Summary

### What you need to know about hydroxychloroquine?

- Take hydroxychloroquine once daily.
- Always come for your blood tests and eye examinations on the scheduled date.
- Beware of the side effects and know when to seek immediate medical attention.
- Do not take over-the-counter medicines, supplements or herbal medicines without checking with your doctor/pharmacist/advanced practiced nurse first.
- For patients who intend to start a family, consult your doctor before you start the treatment.
- If you have any questions about the treatment, please discuss it with your doctor/advanced practice nurse at 65762418 or Pharmacist at 63265077.

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# Hydroxychloroquine



## About your medicine

- Hydroxychloroquine is an anti-malaria drug that is also found useful in the treating of rheumatoid arthritis, some symptoms of lupus and other autoimmune disorders.
- It is believed that hydroxychloroquine interferes with the communication of cells in the immune system.
- It is one of the disease-modifying-anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) which can modify the progress of disease. It may be combined with other DMARDs or biologic agents to control the disease.

## How is the medicine given?

- It is given orally, after food, usually once a day.
- Taking hydroxychloroquine with food or milk will reduce common side effects e.g. nausea and diarrhoea.
- A typical dose is ranged from 200mg to 400mg daily. Higher dosage can be used in some cases.
- Dosage varies among individuals depending on the person's weight and how the disease responds to treatment.

## How long does it take for the medicine to be effective?

- Improvement is usually seen in 3 to 4 weeks. The full benefits of this drug may not be seen until after 12 weeks of treatment.
- You need to take it continuously to keep your symptoms controlled.

## What should I do if I forget a dose?

- If you have missed a dose, take it as soon as you remember.
- If it is almost time for next dose, skip the missed dose and continue with your regular dosing schedule.
- Do not double the dose to make up for the missed dose.

## Do I skip dose if I am sick?

- Seek prompt advice from your doctor when you develop high fever (exceeds 38°C).
- Your doctor will decide whether to stop hydroxychloroquine on a case-by-case basis.

## What are the possible side effects of the medicine?

- Hydroxychloroquine is typically very well tolerated, and serious side effects are rare. However, you should be aware of some of the side effects which can possibly occur:
  - Nausea
  - Stomach upset
  - Skin rashes
  - Skin pigmentation
  - Headache
  - Dizziness
  - Nervousness
  - Muscle weakness (rare)
  - Anemia (rare)
  - Hair changes (bleaching or thinning of hair)
  - Transient blurring of vision – this usually resolves in one to two weeks
  - Damage to the retina (cell layer at the back of the eye) may occur. Affected patients may have blurred vision around lights or have to look to one side of an object in order to see it clearly. Such vision problems are more likely to occur in individuals who are 60 years or older, taking high dosage of hydroxychloroquinie for many years, or in those with significant kidney disease. However, the dosage used in treating autoimmune disorder is much lower than the one in treating malaria. Hence, development of visual problems while taking this medication is extremely unusual. In addition, this risk is greatly reduced by regular eye examination and following the doctor's instructions on daily dosage.

## When do I seek immediate medical attention?

- Come back to the hospital if you have:
  - Any changes in your vision e.g. reading or seeing difficulties (words, letters, or parts of objects missing); sensitivity to light; blurred distance vision or seeing light flashes or streaks
  - Muscle weakness
  - Bleeding or bruising of the skin
  - Difficulty hearing or ringing in the ears
- Stop immediately if you developed skin rash or swelling of eyes/lips and seek medical advice from General Practitioners or Polyclinics.

## What should I do when I am taking the medicine?

- Inform your doctor or pharmacist if you have G6PD (glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase) deficiency.
- Your doctor may also suggest regular eye check-up while taking this medication. Visual changes experienced early on or seen early during regular eye check-ups usually improve after stopping the medication.
- Come back to the hospital for regular blood tests as instructed by your doctor as side effects can happen at any time during the course of treatment, and some of it may not show symptoms.
- Avoid overcrowded places.

## Can I take other medicines or supplements?

- Although there are few drug interactions with hydroxychloroquine, it is still advisable to tell your doctor about all of the medications you are taking, including over-the-counter drugs and supplements.
- This drug does not have a strong effect on the immune system, so vaccines recommended by other physicians are generally acceptable.

## What special dietary instructions should I follow?

- Do not consume raw or undercooked food.