

## 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 leflunomide?

- Take leflunomide once daily.
- Always come for your blood tests 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 practice 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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Department of Pharmacy  
Department of Rheumatology & Immunology



Outram Road  
Singapore 169608  
[www.sgh.com.sg](http://www.sgh.com.sg)

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# Leflunomide



## About your medicine

- Leflunomide is one of the disease-modifying-anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) which can reduce permanent damage to joints caused by continuing inflammation.
- It is often a second-line drug used to treat rheumatoid arthritis and psoriatic arthritis when initial drugs are not working.
- It may be combined with other DMARDs or biologic agents to control disease.

## How is the medicine given?

- It is given orally, after food, usually once-a-day.
- A typical dose is range from 10mg to 20mg daily.
- Dosage varies among individuals depending upon factors such as activity of your disease and your response to the treatment.

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

- Improvement is usually seen in 3-4 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 your 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 any of the serious symptoms of infection.
- Your doctor will decide whether to stop leflunomide on a case-by-case basis.

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

- The most common side effect of leflunomide is diarrhoea. This symptom frequently improves over time or with medications given to prevent diarrhoea. If diarrhoea persists, the dose of leflunomide may need to be reduced, as decided by your doctor.
- Less common side effects include nausea, stomach pain, indigestion, rash, or hair loss.
- It may cause abnormal liver function tests or decreased blood cells.
- Rarely, it may cause lung problems such as cough, shortness of breath or lung injury.

## When do I seek immediate medical attention?

- Come back to the hospital or see a doctor if you have:
  - Dark-colored urine or pale stools
  - Fast, pounding, or uneven heartbeat
  - Shortness of breath, troubled breathing or wheezing
  - Unusual bleeding, bruising or weakness
  - Jaundice (yellowing of skin or the whites of eyes)
  - Seizure

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

- 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?

- You should not take leflunomide if you have a pre-existing liver disease such as hepatitis or cirrhosis.
- Leflunomide can cause liver injury, so alcohol and certain other medications should be avoided e.g. rifampicin.
- Certain medications e.g. cholestyramine can reduce the efficacy of leflunomide.
- You should avoid live vaccines such as live polio, yellow fever, rubella (German measles), MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), typhoid and BCG (tuberculosis). Flu and pneumococcal vaccines are safe and may be given if required.

## What special dietary instructions should I follow?

- Alcohol can increase liver toxicity when taken with leflunomide, it is best avoided.
- Do not consume raw or undercooked food.

## Can I start a family or breastfeed?

- This medication can cause serious birth defects, and may continue to persist even after the drug discontinued.
- Women of childbearing potential should not take this medicine until the possibility of being pregnant is excluded.
- Patients should receive counselling session on fetal risk before treatment.
- Use of effective contraception is critical throughout the course of this treatment and for up to two years after treatment has stopped.
- It is not known whether the males may contribute to fetal toxicity when taking leflunomide. Men should use effective contraception for 3 months after stopping leflunomide.
- Patients taking leflunomide who wish to have a child could ask their doctors to prescribe another drug—cholestyramine—to help remove leflunomide from their body.
- Breastfeeding is not recommended in mothers who are taking leflunomide.