Amiodarone

Prior to commencing amiodarone, you may have some questions about the medication. This handout aims to answer some of these. If you have further questions please don’t hesitate to ask ward pharmacist/docotor or your local pharmacist/GP.

What is Amiodarone and why am I prescribed them?

Amiodarone belongs to the group of medicines known as anti-arrhythmic drugs. It is used to treat fast or irregular heartbeats.

Amiodarone works by slowing down the electrical impulses that cause fast or irregular heartbeats.

How do I take the medication?

When first starting amiodarone, you may take a reducing course such as one tablet three times a day for a week, then one tablet twice a day for a week.

For most patients who then need to continue to take amiodarone the regular dose will usually be one tablet each day.

Take the tablets at the same time each day with a glass of water. Swallow the tablets whole and do not crush or chew the tablet.

Moderate your alcohol intake and avoid grapefruit juice if you are taking amiodarone as it may increase the risk of side-effects.

Many drugs interact with Amiodarone including prescription drugs and over the counter drugs. Please always tell the doctor or pharmacist that you are taking these medicines. They will advise you which medicines are safe to take with them.

What if I miss a dose?

If you are taking your amiodarone as a once a day prescription, take it as soon as you remember it that day. If you forget completely, carry on with your usual dose the next day. DO NOT take a double dose. If you are taking it two or three times a day, do not take the dose you missed and carry on to your next usual dose.
What are the possible side-effects?

- Amiodarone may make your skin more sensitive to sunlight. Keep out of direct sunlight while taking this medicine and for a few months after you have finished taking it. Cover your head with a hat and clothes which cover your arms and legs. Wear high factor sunscreen. You should also avoid using sunbeds whilst taking amiodarone.

- Amiodarone may cause some patients to develop small deposits on the cornea. This does not interfere with daytime vision but you might be dazzled by headlights at night. Be very careful if you drive. Tell your doctor if this becomes a problem. You should have an annual eye test from your optician.

- If you develop yellowing of the skin or the eyes and or dark coloured urine, inform your doctor.

The following side-effects can occur in some people:

- Nausea and vomiting (this resolves with dose reduction)
- Constipation (avoid stimulant laxatives such as senna, bisacodyl)
- Problems sleeping
- Eczema

- Other side effects that can occur which you should inform your doctor of are:
  - Muscle pain
  - New cough
  - Worsening shortness of breath
  - Blurred eyesight or seeing a coloured halo in dazzling light
  - Numbness in fingers or toes
  - General tiredness, weight loss or fever
  - Metallic taste
  - Blue/ grey discoloration of the skin
  - Headache

Will I be monitored during treatment?

- Blood tests including liver function tests, thyroid function tests, chest X-ray and ECG (electrical test of your heartbeat) are carried out prior to commencing treatment.
- Liver function test and thyroid function tests are carried out every 6 months alongside other tests such as chest X-rays and ECG while you are taking amiodarone.
- You should have an annual eye test from your optician during treatment.

Amiodarone should be avoided during pregnancy and breast feeding. Women who are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or breast feeding should talk to their doctor before taking this medicine.

Always read the patient information leaflet provided by the manufacturer.
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