



## PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

# COLCHICINE

### WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THIS LEAFLET?

This leaflet has been written to help you learn more about a type of medicine called colchicine. It tells you what it is and how it works. It also tells you how it is used to treat skin conditions, and where you can find out more information about it.

### WHAT IS COLCHICINE AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Colchicine is a medicine used to reduce inflammation (irritation, redness, swelling, and pain). Colchicine is an extract of the plant *Colchicum autumnale* (autumn crocus). It has been used as a medicine for thousands of years.

Colchicine reduces the activity of certain white blood cells called neutrophils. White blood cells, including neutrophils are part of the body's immune system. When neutrophils become very active, they can release substances that increase inflammation. Colchicine helps to calm this process and reduce the symptoms of inflammation.

### WHAT SKIN CONDITIONS ARE TREATED WITH COLCHICINE?

In the UK, colchicine is licensed for the treatment of a condition called gout. It is also used for many other conditions including:

- chronic [urticaria](#)
- recurrent aphthous ulcers
- pustular psoriasis
- [palmoplantar pustulosis](#)
- [cutaneous vasculitis](#)
- [Behçets](#)
- epidermolysis bullous acquisita
- [Sweet syndrome](#)

Colchicine can be used on its own or together with other treatments.

Colchicine is used for the above conditions as an 'unlicensed treatment'. This is common in the UK. You can read more about unlicensed treatments here:

[www.skinhealthinfo.org.uk/support-resources/jargon-buster/](http://www.skinhealthinfo.org.uk/support-resources/jargon-buster/)

### WILL COLCHICINE CURE MY SKIN CONDITION?

Colchicine can be helpful for multiple skin conditions. However, it may not work for everyone. The skin condition can also return once treatment is stopped.

### HOW OFTEN/WHEN SHOULD COLCHICINE BE USED?

Your healthcare professional will be able to help you decide how often and for how long you will require treatment with colchicine. The medication is available in tablet form to be taken orally (by mouth).

Most of the time, colchicine is used in small regular doses over months or years. This lowers the risk of serious side effects. In other cases, it can be used to relieve a sudden flare-up, through a larger dose over a few hours.

### WHAT DOSE OF COLCHICINE SHOULD BE TAKEN?

Most people start with one 0.5 milligram (mg) tablet a day. This can be increased to 2 mg a day in one, two, three or four doses of 0.5 mg.

The total daily dose should be less than 4mg. For patients with reduced kidney function, the total daily dose should be less than 2mg.

### WHEN SHOULD COLCHICINE NOT BE USED?

Colchicine may not be safe for:



- People with severe kidney problems or on dialysis
- People with very poor liver function

Colchicine should be used with caution for:

- People over 65
- People with reduced liver function
- People with heart, stomach or intestine problems
- People who are pregnant or breast feeding (more information below)

Lower doses may be used for those with reduced liver or kidney function.

### WHAT ARE THE COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF COLCHICINE?

Common side effects include:

- Stomach pain
- Feeling sick (nausea)
- Diarrhoea

Side effects are rare at low doses (under 2 mg a day). They usually go away when the dose is lowered.

### WHAT ARE THE RARE SIDE EFFECTS OF COLCHICINE?

Rare side effects are:

- Low blood levels: this can cause tiredness, infections, easy bruising or bleeding
- Kidney or liver problems
- Hair thinning
- Nerve problems - this can be tingling, numbness or weak muscles
- Severe allergic rash

Contact a healthcare professional immediately if you get any of the following symptoms:

- Yellow eyes/skin
- Unusual bleeding
- Repeated infection
- Severe tiredness
- Trouble breathing

If too much colchicine is taken, early signs are:

- Bad stomach pain
- Severe diarrhoea
- Feeling sick or being sick

More serious problems can happen up to 7 days later, such as:

- Fever
- Abnormal heart rhythm
- Confusion
- Shortness of breath
- Effects on kidney or liver function can happen up to 7 days later.

If you think you have taken too much colchicine it is important you seek immediate emergency medical help.

### HOW WILL THE SIDE EFFECTS OF COLCHICINE TREATMENT BE MONITORED?

Before you start colchicine, you will usually have blood tests. This is to help your healthcare professional understand your normal (baseline) health.

If you need to take colchicine long-term, or if you are at higher risk of side effects, you may need regular blood tests. This is usually every 6 months.

### CAN IMMUNISATIONS (VACCINATIONS) BE GIVEN WHILST USING COLCHICINE?

Yes, vaccinations are safe whilst taking colchicine.

### DOES COLCHICINE AFFECT FERTILITY, PREGNANCY OR BREASTFEEDING?

Experts agree that colchicine is safe to use in pregnancy and breastfeeding when the daily dose is less than 2 mg. Studies have shown that there is no higher risk of problems with the baby or its birth, and small amounts in breast milk do not harm babies. There is limited information on its effect on male fertility. If you have concerns, please discuss them with your healthcare professional.



## CAN ALCOHOL BE CONSUMED WHILE TAKING COLCHICINE?

Yes, alcohol is safe in normal amounts. Grapefruit juice should be avoided as it can raise colchicine to harmful levels.

## CAN OTHER MEDICATIONS BE TAKEN AT THE SAME TIME AS COLCHICINE?

Always seek your healthcare professional's advice if you are taking any of the below medications. This is because they may react with colchicine:

- Statins and fibrates
- [Ciclosporin](#)
- Macrolide antibiotics, e.g. erythromycin, clarithromycin and telithromycin
- Amiodarone
- Itraconazole and ketoconazole
- Antivirals, e.g. atazanavir, indinavir, ritonavir
- Diltiazem, verapamil, quinidine
- Carbamazepine

It is important to report suspected side effects of medicines. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) manages the Yellow Card scheme. This scheme collects information and safety concerns about medicines and medical devices. Anyone can report these side effects or concerns by using:

- the Yellow Card website [yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/](https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/) or
- the Yellow Card app

## WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT COLCHICINE?

*Web links to other relevant sources:*

DermNetNZ:  
[dermnetnz.org/treatments/colchicine.html](https://dermnetnz.org/treatments/colchicine.html)

Patient Info:  
[patient.info/medicine/colchicine-for-gout-attacks](https://patient.info/medicine/colchicine-for-gout-attacks)

(this website addresses colchicine for use in gout)

Jargon Buster:  
[www.skinhealthinfo.org.uk/support-resources/jargon-buster/](https://www.skinhealthinfo.org.uk/support-resources/jargon-buster/)

*Please note that the BAD provides web links to additional resources to help people access a range of information about their treatment or skin condition. The views expressed in these external resources may not be shared by the BAD or its members. The BAD has no control of and does not endorse the content of external links.*

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This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about the subject and is a consensus of the views held by representatives of the British Association of Dermatologists: individual patient circumstances may differ, which might alter both the advice and course of therapy given to you by your doctor.

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*This leaflet has been assessed for readability by the British Association of Dermatologists' Patient Information Lay Review Panel*

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## BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF DERMATOLOGISTS

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