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**DRUGS FOR INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE  
THE AMINOSALICYLATES (5-ASA)**

**PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET**

*This information leaflet is designed to answer common questions patients ask about their medicine. Further information can be found in the information leaflet supplied by the manufacturer or from your pharmacist or doctor.*

If you have been diagnosed with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (Crohn's disease or Ulcerative Colitis) you may be prescribed an aminosalicylate sometimes called 5-ASA:

Sulphasalazine (Salazapyrin), Mesalazine (Mesasal, Salofalk, Pentasa, Mezavant), Balsalazide (Colazide) and Olsalazine (Dipentum).

These drugs have a major role in maintaining remission of ulcerative colitis. Crohn's disease patients may also have limited benefit from treatment with these drugs and they are often used to help reduce the chances of Crohn's disease recurring after operations.

**What are 5-ASA's?**

They are a group of drugs that work by minimising the degree of inflammation in the intestine, giving the damaged lining time to heal.

There are several slightly different drugs in this group that all are designed to treat different areas of the intestine. Your doctor will start you on the one that will give you the most benefit. It is important that you stick to the same unless your doctor discuss with you otherwise.

**How are 5-ASA's given?**

These drugs can be given by mouth (tablets, capsules and granules). For patients whose colitis is limited to the distal part of the colon, these treatments may prove very effective when given through the anus by inserting a suppository or enema.

**How long will it take to work?**

These drugs do not work straight away. In order to remain in remission, you must continue to take your mesalazine even if you feel well.

**Do I need to take 5-ASAs long term?**

To keep the bowel condition under control and to reduce the risk of flare ups, patients are usually advised to take these medications long term.

The risk of bowel cancer in inflammatory bowel disease is slightly increased, but some studies have suggested that this risk may be reduced by long-term use of 5-ASA.

**What dose of 5-ASAs will I be given?**

The dose will be decided by your doctor, and usually depends on how active the disease is and may be increased or decreased accordingly.

You will usually remain on a dose to help keep your disease under control, this is known as a maintenance dose.

**What are the common side effects?**

5-ASAs are effective in the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease but can occasionally be associated with some side effects, which are usually mild such as diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, headaches, and rashes.

Generally however, these drugs are very well tolerated with majority of patients experiencing no side-effects.

Very rarely, these drugs can affect the blood, kidneys, liver, lung, pancreas or nervous system.

Rarely some patients can be allergic or particularly sensitive to 5-ASAs and so it is important to report any unexplained bleeding, bruising, skin rash, prolonged sore throat or fever. If this happens sometimes the drug has to be stopped or changed. These side effects usually resolved after cessation of medication.

**Sulphasalazine:**

*Glucose 6 phosphate dehydrogenase deficiency (rare genetic disorder) – may cause haemolysis.*

*Pregnancy / breast feeding : may be associated with transient reversible oligospermia in men of child bearing potential. Folic acid supplements should be prescribed to those trying to conceive and during pregnancy. Small amounts of the drug are excreted in breast milk although this is not thought to be a risk to healthy infants.*

*Contraindicated in patients with hypersensitivity to sulphonamides / co-trimoxazole.*

**Do I need to have blood tests?**

Because these drugs very rarely can cause blood disorders, your Doctor or Nurse Specialist will arrange for you to have occasional blood checks – these would normally be done within first month of starting the medication and every 6-12 months thereafter if there was no abnormality detected on blood test.

**Can I have immunisations whilst taking 5-ASA's?**

It is safe to have Vaccinations whilst on 5-ASAs.

**Can I drink alcohol whilst taking 5-ASA's?**

There is no reason to avoid alcohol (in moderation) whilst taking 5-ASAs, but it can sometimes aggravate nausea.

**Do 5-ASA's affect fertility or pregnancy?**

There is one drug called Salazopyrin (sulphasalazine) that is associated with a reversible reduction of male fertility. Salazopyrin is used less frequently nowadays as the newer drugs may have fewer side effects. Other 5-ASAs do not affect fertility and all can be safely taken in pregnancy.

**Do these drugs interfere with my other medicines?**

Most drugs can be taken safely, however *always* check with your doctor or pharmacist first.

*For further information you can contact your Doctor or Gastroenterology specialist.*