

# Amiodarone: Patient Information Booklet

# Your information

Name:

Hospital number:

Name of GP:

Address:

Postcode:

Telephone number:

Clinician managing your amiodarone:

Date treatment started:

Reason for treatment:

Expected duration of treatment:

## **Introduction**

This booklet has been given to you because you are starting to take a medicine known as amiodarone.

A pharmacist, doctor, or nurse will go through this booklet with you, and answer any questions you may have.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with information on amiodarone, including:

- What amiodarone is and what it is used for
- Tests required before starting treatment
- How to take amiodarone
- Possible side-effects
- Monitoring
- Interactions with other medicines
- Other cautions
- Further information

This booklet is designed for patients or carers of patients who have been prescribed amiodarone.

As with all medicines, you should make sure that you read the manufacturer's leaflet as well as this booklet before you start taking amiodarone.

## **Before starting treatment with amiodarone**

Please ensure that your doctor or pharmacist knows if you:

- have an allergy to amiodarone, iodine or any of the other ingredients.
- have or have had thyroid problems (a thyroid test is required before starting this medicine).
- are pregnant or likely to become pregnant.
- are breast feeding.
- suffer from any liver or kidney problems.

## **What is amiodarone and what is it used for?**

Amiodarone belongs to a group of medicines known as “anti-arrhythmics”. It is designed to treat and prevent different types of problems with heartbeats, including:

- “Tachycardias” (very fast heartbeat)
- “Fibrillation” (irregular, uncoordinated heartbeat)
- “Wolff-Parkinson-White Syndrome” (a specific condition where the heart beats abnormally fast for periods of time)

Amiodarone works by slowing down the electrical signals that travel through the heart, which helps to control the heartbeat.

## **Tests required before starting treatment**

Amiodarone treatment is usually started by a cardiologist (heart specialist). As well as affecting the

heart, amiodarone can affect the lungs, the liver, and the thyroid gland. The specialist will therefore perform tests to check these organs to ensure that amiodarone is suitable for you. These tests include:

1. Electrocardiogram (ECG)
2. Chest X-ray
3. Liver Function Tests (LFTs)
4. Thyroid Function Tests (TFTs)

### **Ongoing Monitoring**

You will need a blood test every 6 months to check your liver and thyroid function while taking amiodarone. You will also need an ECG every year. These will usually be arranged by your GP.

You can use the table below to record the dates on which you had your tests. If it has been over 6 months since your last blood test, or over 12 months since your last ECG, please contact your GP.

<b>Test</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Liver Function Tests</b>				
<b>Thyroid Function Tests</b>				
<b>ECG</b>				

Amiodarone can have its effects on the body for a long time. If your doctor decides to stop amiodarone, you

may therefore need to continue to have blood tests for a few months afterwards.

## **How to take amiodarone**

Take your amiodarone tablets at about the same time each day. Tablets should be swallowed with a glass of water.

A high dose is used initially to achieve high levels of the medicine in your blood. This is then usually reduced to a dose of one 200mg tablet once a day, within a few weeks of starting treatment.

You may not need to be on amiodarone long-term, and will be reviewed regularly by your doctor.

Do not stop taking your amiodarone tablets without talking to your doctor first.

## **Missed doses**

If you miss a dose of amiodarone, take it as soon as you remember. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and continue taking doses at the usual time. **NEVER take two doses at the same time to make up.** If in doubt, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

## **Possible side effects**

Like all medicines, amiodarone can cause side effects, although not everybody gets them. Some of these side

effects can be serious and can occur any time after starting treatment.

### Allergic reaction

Amiodarone can rarely cause allergic reactions. Severe reaction signs include: a rash, swallowing or breathing difficulties, swollen eyes, face, lips, throat, or tongue. If you develop any of these symptoms, **stop taking amiodarone and seek urgent medical attention.**

### Lungs

Amiodarone can affect the lungs. If you develop shortness of breath or difficulty breathing (which may get progressively worse), tightness in the chest, coughing which will not go away, wheezing, weight loss and fever, **see your GP or seek medical help immediately.** These symptoms could be due to inflammation of your lungs, which can be very dangerous. Prompt treatment can prevent long term damage.

### Thyroid gland

Amiodarone can make you produce too much or too little thyroid hormone. If you experience weakness, weight loss or weight gain, heat or cold intolerance, hair thinning, sweating, changes in menstrual periods, swelling of the neck (goitre), nervousness, irritability, restlessness, or decreased concentration; these may be signs of thyroid problems, **see your GP or seek medical help immediately.**

## Heart

Amiodarone may cause heart problems, such as slowing of the heart. This may make you feel tired, dizzy, or faint. If you notice this, you should tell your GP as soon as possible.

If your heartbeat becomes more uneven or erratic, this could be a sign that the medicine is not working well, **see your GP or seek medical help immediately.**

## Liver

Amiodarone can affect the liver. If you develop yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice), loss of appetite, stomach pain, or fever, **see your GP or seek medical help immediately.** These symptoms could be signs of liver problems which can be very dangerous.

## Eyes

You should get your eyes checked every year.

Amiodarone can cause blurred vision, and you may see a coloured 'halo' around objects in dazzling light. These vision disturbances are generally mild and do not require stopping amiodarone. However, blurred or decreased vision can signal damage to your eyes. If you experience these symptoms contact your GP as soon as possible.

## **Nervous system**

Amiodarone can cause side-effects such as shaking, unsteady walking, weakness of the hands or legs, and pins and needles. If you experience any of these side-effects, see your GP.

## **Skin**

Amiodarone can make your skin sensitive to sunlight. You should avoid direct skin exposure to sunlight or sunlamps. When in the sun, you should wear clothing that covers your arms and legs. Total sunblock should be applied to any exposed areas of skin.

Amiodarone can cause a grey or blue discolouration of your skin. This should gradually decrease if amiodarone is stopped, but it may not go away completely.

## **Specialist Referral**

If you experience any severe side effects where this booklet advises you to speak to your GP or seek medical help immediately, the doctor you see will refer to the cardiology specialist for advice about your amiodarone treatment. The cardiology team will provide advice about continuing or stopping your amiodarone within 5 days of the referral. They will also refer you to another specialist for review and treatment of your side effects as appropriate.

## **Other medicines**

Amiodarone can affect the way some other medicines work and vice versa. Please speak with your community pharmacist initially to check if there is a potential interaction with amiodarone before you start taking new medicines, supplements, or herbal remedies.

**\*Please note that it takes a long time for amiodarone to be removed from the body, so drug interactions can occur several weeks or even months after treatment has stopped. \***

## **Other cautions**

### **Alcohol**

You should limit the amount of alcohol you drink whilst you are being treated with amiodarone.

### **Food and drink**

Grapefruit can increase the level of amiodarone in the body. Avoid drinking grapefruit juice during treatment with amiodarone.

### **Driving**

Amiodarone can cause blurred vision and you may be 'dazzled' by bright lights, especially at night time. If you experience this, you should not drive or operate machinery.

## **Further information**

If you have any questions about amiodarone or about the information in this booklet, contact your GP or local community pharmacist.