



# BOB ICB Amiodarone Therapy - Patient Information leaflet

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## Amiodarone therapy - Patient information leaflet

### Introduction

You have been advised to take a medicine called Amiodarone, which is why you have been given this information booklet. The aim of this booklet is to provide you with information regarding the safe use and monitoring of Amiodarone. In addition to this information booklet, always make sure that you read the manufacturer's drug information leaflet.

### Treatment with Amiodarone

Amiodarone belongs to a group of drugs known as 'antiarrhythmics' and is used to control abnormal heart rhythms such as an irregular or fast heart rate. Abnormal heart rhythms such as atrial fibrillation, ventricular tachycardia and atrial flutter can be treated using Amiodarone.

Amiodarone is used to keep the heart in its normal rhythm. It is also used when the heart has gone out of rhythm to help it return to normal. It is a very effective medication but can produce side effects which your doctors will need to monitor.

Before taking Amiodarone make sure that the person prescribing it knows if you:

- have a history of thyroid problems
- have an allergy to Amiodarone or Iodine
- are pregnant, breast feeding or planning a pregnancy
- have a slow pulse or suffer with episodes of dizziness
- suffer with liver or kidney problems

### Commencing Amiodarone

Amiodarone is usually recommended by a Cardiologist (heart specialist) or an Electrophysiologist (heart specialist who has a particular interest in abnormal heart rhythms). Prior to starting Amiodarone it is normal to have some tests which will include blood tests to assess how well your liver, thyroid gland and kidneys are working and to ensure that Amiodarone is suitable for you to take. Both your specialist team and your GP will be involved in the initiation of treatment and ongoing monitoring whilst taking Amiodarone. Amiodarone can be a long-term treatment or given for a shorter period of time (3-12 months). During the treatment period you will need to be reviewed by your general practitioner and/or specialist team.

You should normally expect to have the following blood tests and checks:

- When amiodarone is started: Blood tests, ECG and assessment of your lungs by specialist.
- 6 months after starting, blood tests by GP.
- 1 year after starting, review by specialist including blood tests, ECG and assessment of lungs.
- 6 months after the above, blood test by GP.
- 6 months after the above, review by specialist - and continuing the pattern as above.

## Dose

A high dose (loading dose) of Amiodarone is prescribed for the first weeks because uptake of the drug through the stomach and intestines is slow – it can take a few weeks to reach its full effect. The dose will normally be reduced to one daily 200mg tablet after two weeks of starting treatment.

Standard loading consists of:

Week 1: One 200mg tablet three times a day for 7 days;

Week 2: One 200mg tablet twice a day for 7 days;

Week 3: One 200mg tablet once daily thereafter

Other loading doses may be prescribed in some instances guided by the advice of your cardiologist or specialist nurse.

Where possible try to take your tablets at about the same time each day. Amiodarone should be swallowed whole. If you miss a dose of Amiodarone, take the missed dose as soon as possible. If you are nearing your next prescribed dose, skip the missed dose and take the next one as scheduled. Do **not** take two doses at the same time..

Do **not** stop taking your tablets without talking to your general practitioner or hospital specialist.

## Possible side effects

Amiodarone is often well tolerated although it can have significant side effects which affect different parts of the body - the potential side effects are listed below. Although many of the side effects occur in less than 1 in 10 people they can be problematic, and this does mean that continued monitoring whilst taking Amiodarone is important.

**Skin:** Amiodarone will commonly make your skin more sensitive to sunburn. Using sun block and wearing protective clothing such as a sun hat can help to prevent this. Amiodarone can remain in the body for several months after it has been stopped so it may be necessary to continue use of sun precautions after you have stopped taking it for a few months. Amiodarone can occasionally result in the skin looking slightly grey

or having a bluish tinge to it. This often reverses on stopping the medication but can take some time.

**Eyes:** Small unharmed deposits can form in the cornea of the eye. Sometimes however, you may notice these deposits when looking at bright lights particularly at night e.g. whilst driving you may notice a bluish halo. If you experience blurred vision you must **not** drive or operate machinery.

**Lungs:** Amiodarone can rarely cause thickening (fibrosis) of the lung tissue. If you notice any changes in your breathing such as shortness of breath you should see your general practitioner or hospital specialist for advice.

**Heart:** Sometimes Amiodarone can slow the heart rate too much (bradycardia). Bradycardia can result in tiredness and dizziness. If you notice these symptoms or have concerns, please see your general practitioner or hospital specialist for advice.

**Liver:** Rarely, Amiodarone can impact on normal liver function requiring a change in dose or stopping treatment. Whilst taking Amiodarone, routine blood tests at 6-monthly intervals should be carried out to assess liver function. If you notice yellow discoloration of the skin or eyes then contact your general practitioner or hospital specialist for advice.

**Thyroid:** The thyroid gland produces hormones that control the body's metabolic rate as well as heart, digestive function and bone maintenance. Amiodarone contains iodine which can cause changes in the thyroid function such as making the thyroid overactive or underactive (this occurs in less than 1:10 of patients). Overactive and underactive thyroid function can be treated with medication but your Amiodarone may need to be stopped in some cases. Your GP and specialist will monitor your thyroid function with 6 monthly blood tests whilst taking Amiodarone. Should you develop symptoms of extreme tiredness, nervousness, anxiety or hair loss you should seek a review with your general practitioner or hospital specialist.

**Additional effects:** For some people, it is possible, that Amiodarone can change the way things taste, cause shakiness, nightmares and sometimes difficulties sleeping.

**Effects on other medication:** Amiodarone is known to interact with a number of other drugs including herbal supplements and some over the counter medications. Always let your GP, pharmacist and health care provider know that you are taking Amiodarone and seek advice before taking any over the counter medicines or herbal supplements such as St John's Wort. Grapefruit juice should be avoided whilst taking Amiodarone. If in doubt, please speak to your local pharmacist.

Amiodarone frequently interacts with Warfarin, particularly at the start of treatment which can result in increases to your INR. If you take Warfarin it is very important that you get your INR checked more frequently and let your warfarin/INR clinic know that you have been commenced on Amiodarone immediately. We recommend that your INR is checked at least weekly in the first 7 weeks of starting Amiodarone.

This leaflet explains some of the most common side-effects that some people may experience. However, it is not comprehensive. If you experience other side-effects and want to ask anything else related to your treatment please contact either the specialist in charge of your care, general practitioner or local pharmacist for further advice.

**Pregnancy and breastfeeding:** Amiodarone can be harmful to the unborn child and is present in breast milk so should not normally be taken during pregnancy or whilst breastfeeding. If you are taking amiodarone and are considering trying to become pregnant, please discuss this with your doctor. If you are taking amiodarone, and think you could be pregnant you should take a pregnancy test and inform the specialist or GP immediately if you become pregnant or wish to become pregnant.