

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Tocilizumab for rheumatoid arthritis

NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.

This leaflet is about when **tocilizumab** should be used to treat people with rheumatoid arthritis in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for people with rheumatoid arthritis but it may also be useful for their families or carers or for anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe rheumatoid arthritis or the treatments in detail – a member of your healthcare team should discuss these with you. You can get more information from the organisations listed on the back page.



This may not be the only possible treatment for rheumatoid arthritis. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

What has NICE said?

NICE recommends tocilizumab, taken with a drug called methotrexate, as a possible treatment for some people with rheumatoid arthritis (see below).

Who can have tocilizumab?

You should be able to have tocilizumab if:

- you have moderate to severe active rheumatoid arthritis **and**
- you have tried at least one drug called a tumour necrosis factor alpha (or TNF- α for short) inhibitor and a drug called rituximab but these have not worked.

If you cannot take rituximab for medical reasons or you had to stop taking it because you had a bad reaction to it, you should still be able to have tocilizumab if you have moderate to severe active rheumatoid arthritis and have tried at least one drug called a TNF- α inhibitor.

Why has NICE said this?

NICE looks at how well treatments work, and also at how well they work in relation to how much they cost the NHS. NICE recommended tocilizumab in these circumstances because it works well and its cost is justified after other drugs that are likely to be equally effective and cheaper to give have been tried.

Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is a condition that causes pain, swelling and inflammation in your joints. Symptoms usually come and go, but can sometimes get much worse, and this is known as a 'flare-up'. Over time, the joints become damaged and stop working properly. The damage is caused when the body's immune system, which normally fights infection, goes wrong and starts to attack healthy joints. People with severe active rheumatoid arthritis have a high level of joint inflammation and pain, which affects their ability to carry out everyday tasks.

Tocilizumab

Tocilizumab is a drug that helps to reduce the pain and swelling caused by rheumatoid arthritis. It may slow down the progression of the condition and help to prevent permanent joint damage.

What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must make sure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued.

So, if you have moderate to severe active rheumatoid arthritis and you and your doctor think that tocilizumab is the right treatment for you (see 'What has NICE said?' on page 2), you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Please see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance if you think you are eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

If you are already taking tocilizumab for rheumatoid arthritis but your circumstances do not meet the criteria given on page 2 (see 'What has NICE said?'), you should be able to continue taking it until you and your healthcare professional decide it is the right time to stop.

More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with rheumatoid arthritis. NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Arthritis Care, 0808 800 4050
www.arthritiscare.org.uk
- National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society, 0800 298 7650
www.nras.org.uk

NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) may be a good place to find out more. Your local patient advice and liaison service (usually known as 'PALS') may be able to give you more information and support. If you live in Wales you should speak to NHS Direct Wales for information on who to contact.

About NICE

NICE produces guidance (advice) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts, including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider the evidence on the condition and treatments, the views of patients and carers and the experiences of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance

This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA198

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote reference N2277). The NICE website has a screen reader service called Browsealoud, which allows you to listen to our guidance. Click on the Browsealoud logo on the NICE website to use this service.

We encourage NHS and voluntary organisations to use text from this leaflet in their own information about rheumatoid arthritis.