



Australian
Rheumatology
Association

PATIENT INFORMATION ON GOLD

(Examples of brand names: Myocrisin, Ridaura)

This information sheet has been produced by the Australian Rheumatology Association to help you understand the medicine that has been prescribed for you. It includes important information about:

- How you should take your medicine;
- What are the possible side effects;
- What tests you **must** have to monitor your condition and to detect unwanted effects; and
- Other precautions you should take.

Please read it carefully and discuss with your doctor.

What is gold therapy?

Gold medicines are used to treat rheumatoid arthritis. They may also be used occasionally to treat other diseases such as psoriatic arthritis.

They are prepared from metallic gold. They have been used to treat rheumatoid arthritis for over 70 years. While gold can be very effective for some patients, it is used infrequently today as more effective medicines have become available.

It is not entirely clear how gold works but it is thought to have an effect on the activity of the immune system. In rheumatoid arthritis, this action helps to reduce inflammation and thus reduce pain and swelling. It also limits damage to the joints and helps to prevent disability in the long term.

Because gold acts to reduce the damage to the joints, rather than just relieve the pain, it belongs to the group of medicines called **disease modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs)**.

For more information about RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS see the Arthritis Australia website

www.arthritisaustralia.com.au/index.php/art-hritis-information/information-sheets.html.

What benefit can you expect from your treatment?

Between 60% and 70% of people treated with gold respond well. Many improve quite dramatically and some may even go into remission where the arthritis virtually disappears.

Gold treatment does not work straight away. Improvement in joint pain, swelling and stiffness is usually seen in 8 to 12 weeks. However it may take up to 24 weeks in some people to show any benefits.

Other medicines may be given to improve your symptoms while waiting for gold treatment to work.

If your arthritis is well controlled with gold and there are no side effects, you can take the medicine indefinitely. It may be possible to reduce or even stop treatment, but only on your doctor's advice.

If gold treatment is stopped for more than a few weeks there is a risk that your condition may worsen. Continue with your treatment unless advised by your doctor or unless side effects develop.

How is gold given?

One form of gold, sodium aurothiomalate (brand name Myocrisin) is a liquid, which is injected into a muscle. The other form,

auranofin (brand name Ridaura), is taken as tablets.

Injectable gold is given into the large muscles such as the buttock or shoulder, not into the joints.

The first dose is usually a very small "test" dose e.g. 10 mg to make sure that you are not sensitive to the medicine.

The usual maintenance dose for adults is in the range of 25 to 50mg. This is given once a week for the first 4 to 6 months. After that, if there is an improvement in your condition, the frequency of injections may be reduced to fortnightly or even monthly intervals.

It is generally not a problem if you miss a single dose of gold, for example if you are on holidays. A change in the schedule of dosage can be worked out beforehand.

Gold tablets are used less frequently than injections, as they seem to be less effective. They are taken daily at a dose of between one and three of the 3 mg tablets.

Gold may be used with other arthritis medicines including:

- other DMARDs such as methotrexate;
- steroid medicines such as prednisolone or cortisone injections into the joint;
- anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs) such as naproxen (Naprosyn) or ibuprofen (Brufen/Nurofen); and/or
- simple pain medicines such as paracetamol.

Are there any possible side effects?

Below are side effects that you might experience with your treatment. Tell your doctor if you experience any side effects.

If you do experience side effects, a reduction in dose may minimise these so that you can continue to take the medicine. Your doctor will advise on any dose changes that are necessary.

Most common possible side effects:

- The most common side effects include *skin itchiness*, a variety of *skin rashes* and *increased sensitivity to the sun*. It is a

good idea to apply sunscreen and wear a hat when out in the sun.

- Other side effects such as *mouth ulcers*, *alterations in taste* (metallic taste), *hot flushes* and *diarrhoea*.
- Immediately following an injection you may feel *dizzy*, *flushed* or *weak*. These feelings should go away if you lay down for a few minutes.
- *Joint pain* for one or two days after the injection may occur but should only happen with the first few injections.

Less common or rare possible side effects:

There are some rare but potentially serious side effects with gold treatment.

- **Blood cells:** Gold may cause a drop in the numbers of white blood cells, which fight infection. It may also cause a drop in the numbers of platelets, which help to stop bleeding. If you develop a sore mouth, mouth ulcers, easy bruising, nosebleeds, bleeding gums, breathlessness, infection or fever tell your doctor straight away.
- **Kidneys:** Infrequently, gold may affect the kidneys. This causes leakage of protein and blood into the urine. Traces of protein and/or blood in the urine are often not a problem; larger amounts usually mean that gold will be stopped. If protein leakage does occur, provided the gold is stopped, there is little chance of serious kidney damage developing.
- Other side effects include liver injury, lung disease or inflammation of the intestines, (enterocolitis). Although serious, they are very rare.

What precautions are necessary?

Blood and urine tests:

- Since the blood cells and kidneys may be affected by gold treatment, you **must** have regular blood and urine checks. To start these are before each gold injection. With time the interval between tests may be increased. With tablets monthly test may be required.

