Satakunnan hyvinvointialue

Rituximab, MABTHERA®, RITEMVIA®, RIXATHON® – in the treatment of rheumatic diseases

Indications

Rituximab is used for indications such as treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and vasculitis (inflammation of the blood vessels) when sufficient treatment response is not achieved with traditional antirheumatic drugs or they cannot be used.

Drug product and mode of action

Rituximab belongs to a class of drugs called biologic drugs. Rituximab is an antibody that binds to a protein called CD20 which occurs on the surface of certain white blood cells known as B cells, causing their number to decrease. Rituximab reduces the rheumatic inflammatory process, alleviates joint inflammation and the symptoms associated with connective tissue disease, and prevents the progress of the disease and joint damage.

Dosage and method of administration

In rheumatoid arthritis, the first treatment cycle consists of two 1000 mg doses of rituximab given as an intravenous infusion (into a vein) two weeks apart. The infusion usually takes 2–6 hours, during which the patient's condition is monitored by a nurse. After the treatment has been administered, the patient is monitored for an hour in hospital. Before the onset of infusion, the patient is given premedication (methylprednisolone, paracetamol and antihistamine) to prevent drug reactions. A new treatment cycle (1-2 doses) is usually given once every 6 months.
For patients with vasculitis, rituximab may also be given as weekly infusions, 375mg/m^2 body surface area every 4 weeks.

Adverse effects

During administration of the drug, itching, fever, skin rash, shaking, throat irritation, shortness of breath and a drop or increase in blood pressure may occur. The symptoms are usually mild and disappear when the rate of infusion flow is slowed down. Drug reactions are relatively common at the first administration, but occur only rarely later on.
Rituximab may increase susceptibility to infections. Treatment must not be given if the patient has an acute infection or a severe chronic infection. Some patients experience infections after treatment. Severe brain infection has been observed in some patients as a very rare adverse effect. Tell your doctor if you notice loss of memory, difficulty thinking or walking, or if you experience vision disturbances.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

The use of rituximab is not recommended during pregnancy or breastfeeding. It is recommended that the drug is stopped 6 months before pregnancy.

Treatment follow-up

Safety tests are taken once every **3-6 months**. The safety tests include the following: **Basic blood count, B-NEUT and ALT**. **CREA, U-ChemScr, CRP, ESR** and **Immunoglobulins** are measured in connection with treatment assessment before doctor's appointment every 6–12 months.

Other considerations

Rituximab is stopped 4-6 months before and 2 weeks after surgery. The operation is timed so that it takes place when the next dose would be taken. In the case of individual patients, the duration of the drug pause also depends on the type and urgency of the operation, patient's overall infection risk, and risk of recurrence of the underlying illness. The use of the drug may be restarted once the wound has healed properly.
Vaccines that contain live attenuated organisms should not be given during the treatment. Before the onset of treatment, any dental procedures required must be completed and vaccinations must be up to date.

Link Reumalääkkeiden ohjeet | Reumatalo.fi | Terveyskylä.fi (in Finnish)

Wellbeing services county of Satakunta