

Renal Services

Antithymocyte immunoglobulin (ATG): Information for kidney transplant patients

What is it used for?

ATG is an immunosuppressant drug used in a small number of patients who show rejection of their new kidney after transplant. It is usually used after higher doses of steroids have been tried for rejection, or if it is already known that you have antibodies against your donor kidney.

How does it work?

ATG works by stopping the body's production of cells that make up part of your immune system. This dampens down your immune system to stop rejection of your new kidney.

How do I take it?

A nurse will give you a daily dose of ATG by injection over a few hours. The dose is calculated depending on your weight and you will usually need a daily dose for 7-14 days. Your consultant will decide how long you need to have ATG for.

Are there any side effects?

You may experience an allergy type reaction during the injection. These are generally mild and include flu-like symptoms, headaches, itching, and a change in temperature or blood pressure.

Rarely, ATG can cause more serious allergy type reactions, including shortness of breath due to fluid in the lungs. You will be monitored closely on the ward both during and after you receive the infusion and allergy treatment will be given if necessary.

You will also be given treatment with paracetamol, a steroid injection and an anti-itch medicine before you receive ATG to help prevent any reaction.

ATG can lower some of your blood test results, including some types of white blood cells. Because of this, it is important that you report any unexplained bruising or



Patient Information

bleeding as this can be a symptom. Your doctor will monitor your blood tests in clinic.

Is there anything else I should know?

Taking immunosuppressant medicines may mean you experience some long term effects on your health that you need to be aware of. These include an increased risk of infection and an increased risk of cancer. You should follow all the general health advice given to you by the transplant team. Please read the booklet they give you carefully, as this will provide you with more information.

As ATG is a very strong immunosuppressant, you will be told to reduce or stop some of your other immunosuppressant medicines, for example, tacrolimus during the ATG course. Your consultant will advise you when to restart your regular immunosuppressants again.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 7777 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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