

If you have any further queries about side effects,
there are some useful sources of information below:

www.msactivesource.co.uk

www.msactivesource.ie

www.msdecisions.org.uk

The following organisations are also available to help:

Multiple Sclerosis Society

www.mssociety.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 800 8000

email: helpline@mssociety.org.uk

Multiple Sclerosis Trust

www.mstrust.org.uk

Tel: 01462 476700

email: info@mstrust.org.uk

Irish Multiple Sclerosis Society

www.ms-society.ie

Helpline: 1850 233233

email: mshelpline@ms-society.ie



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Thinking about side effects



Supporting you
each step of the way

Questions you may have about unwanted reactions to your therapy

As with all medicines, disease modifying treatments (DMTs) for MS may cause some unwanted side effects in some people. If this happens, there are usually effective ways of resolving them.

Not everyone will have problems with side effects. Remember though that if you do, they are generally mild and short-lived, so try to think about them in relation to the benefits of your treatment.

Which side effects can be common with interferon beta therapy?

At the start of therapy, the most common side effects are flu-like symptoms, although the extent of these will vary from person to person. They usually occur within the first 2-5 hours after an injection and can last up to a couple of days to begin with. Typically the problem wears off after about three months of treatment. Many people find that the worst of these flu-like effects settle down after just 2-3 injections before almost disappearing after 4-6 weeks.

To help ease these symptoms, your nurse or doctor might suggest taking some paracetamol or ibuprofen. It's also a good idea to have your injection at night, before you go to bed, so you will sleep through most of the symptoms.

What about glatiramer acetate?

The side effects that can occur with glatiramer acetate can be different to those with interferon betas. While not as common as the flu-like symptoms with interferon betas, a small percentage of people experience chest pains

or tightness, flushing, sweating and feelings of anxiety. Understandably these symptoms can be a little frightening at first. Reassuringly they are usually mild and only last for about 30 minutes at a time, before disappearing of their own accord. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you do experience these effects as they can discuss ways of handling them with you.

Are there ways to reduce side effects?

When you are first prescribed a DMT for your MS, your doctor may gradually increase the dose of your medication over the first few weeks. This is known as titration. In combination with drugs such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, it may help to reduce some of the flu-like symptoms associated with treatment. This is only possible with some of the DMTs available.

Do side effects differ with type of injection?

Depending on the type of injection used, you may experience a reaction around the area of skin where you inject (known as the injection site).

With subcutaneous injections (those that are injected just beneath the skin), the injection site occasionally becomes hard and red. This can be painful, but your doctor will be able to give you a cream to calm it. As with all injections it is important to rotate the injection site.

With intramuscular injections (those that are injected directly into the muscle), you may experience some soreness in the muscle where you inject. As with

subcutaneous injections, it's important to rotate your injection sites to give your body a break. Keep track of where you inject each time by writing it down in a notebook.

What can I do to stay on track with my MS therapy?

The experience of side effects can make it hard to remember the long-term benefits of treatment. Some people may feel that they want to stop treatment altogether. However, to gain the benefits of DMTs, you need to take them as prescribed over the long term or until your doctor says otherwise. If you're struggling with a DMT or feel like giving up on treatment, it's important that you talk to your nurse or neurologist as soon as possible. They have lots of experience and will be able to offer you the support and advice you need to cope. There are also a few things you can do to help you keep on track with your MS therapy:

- Learn as much as you can about MS and DMTs, and get involved in decisions about your care and treatment
- Understand and use proper injection techniques and rotate your injection sites to minimise injection-site reactions
- Invest in a timer or electronic device to help you remember your injection schedule, or time injections to another routine task, such as brushing your teeth
- Rely on a supportive network of family and friends for help when you are feeling discouraged

Always talk to your MS nurse or neurologist before stopping treatment.