

Treatments for MS:

Avonex[®] (interferon beta-1a)

There is a range of disease modifying therapies approved for people with MS in Australia. These therapies, also called immunotherapies, work to reduce disease activity in the central nervous system and reduce the frequency and severity of relapses in people with MS.

What is Avonex[®] and how does it work?

Avonex[®] is interferon beta-1a. Interferons are proteins produced naturally in the human body to help fight infections and regulate the immune system. Beta interferons have been shown to slow down activity and disease progression in MS. They do this by helping regulate the immune system, reducing attacks on myelin or nerves. Researchers are still investigating exactly how this process works.

Clinical trials¹ found that Avonex[®] (interferon beta -1a) has a significant beneficial effect in people with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis (RRMS) by reducing the accumulation of permanent physical disability, exacerbation (relapse) frequency and disease activity measured by gadolinium-enhanced lesions on brain magnetic resonance images (MRI).

How is Avonex[®] administered?

A 30 microgram dose of Avonex[®] is taken weekly by injection into muscle, usually in the thigh or upper arm. The buttock is not a suitable site. You will receive a month's supply in a box, which will consist of four injections. Your doctor or MS nurse may provide you with an AVOSTARTCLIP titration kit to help gradually increase your dose during the first three weeks of treatment. Many people with MS learn to give themselves the injection or have it given by a carer, following initial supervision by a qualified healthcare professional.

What are the potential side effects of Avonex[®] treatment?

Avonex[®] helps most people with MS, but it may have side effects in some people.

The most common side effect is to feel 'flu-like' symptoms, e.g. headache, tiredness, muscle aches, joint pain, shivering and fever. These side effects generally occur less often as therapy continues.

Other common side effects are: fatigue, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea, pain or migraine, muscle stiffness or spasms, dizziness, sleeplessness, soreness, redness or bruising at the injection site, loss of appetite, runny nose, increased sweating or flushing, menstrual upsets, rash, hair loss, and reduced sensitivity to touch however, you may not experience any of them. Serious side effects are rare.

Other side effects may also occur in some patients – tell your doctor if you notice anything else that is making you feel unwell.

How much does Avonex cost?

Avonex[®] has been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and is available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). Please discuss with your neurologist whether

Avonex® is the right treatment for you. Your neurologist will need to obtain an authority to prescribe the medication for you. There are a number of criteria you must meet before your doctor receives authority to write this prescription.

For details of the criteria you need to meet to receive Avonex® through the PBS, please visit the official PBS website at:

<http://www.pbs.gov.au/medicine/item/8289G>

<http://www.pbs.gov.au/medicine/item/8805K>

You will need to click on the red **Authority Required (STREAMLINED)** link.

If you are eligible for medications through the PBS, you will need to pay a contribution fee each time your prescription is dispensed. The Federal Government pays for the remaining cost. The amount of the contribution fee depends upon whether or not you have a pension or concession card. The amount of this fee is set each year by the Federal Government.

Further information about the PBS, your entitlements and details regarding the PBS safety net (which protects patients and their families requiring a large number of PBS items) is available through the Medicare Australia website at: www.medicare.gov.au If you are not eligible for Avonex® through the PBS, for example if you are a visitor from overseas, your neurologist may write a private prescription. In this instance you will have to pay the full cost to the pharmacy that dispenses your medication. You will need to request a quote from your pharmacist for the price of any medication which is not subsidised by the PBS.

General Information

Not all pharmacies keep Avonex® in stock. It is therefore important to let your pharmacist know a few days before you need the medication so that they can order it in for you.

Avonex® Bioset vials need to be stored below 25°C. Avonex® prefilled syringes need to be kept between 2-8°C. If the outside temperature is warm it is a good idea to take your medication home in an ice cooler. Your pharmacist may be able to assist with this.

Biogen Idec runs a Patient Support Program called MS Alliance. The website for MS Alliance is www.msalliance.com.au and the toll free helpline is 1800 286 639.

Avonex® is manufactured by:

Biogen Australia Pty Ltd
Level 3, 123 Epping Road
North Ryde, NSW 2113
Ph: 02 8875 3900

For more information on MS and other MS treatments

- Speak to your neurologist about what treatment best suits your individual circumstances.
 - MS Nurses can also provide information, training and ongoing support in managing your immunotherapy.
 - For information about MS, MS treatment and to find contact details for your state MS organization visit www.msaustralia.org.au
 - MS Research Australia provides information on the latest research and clinical trials at www.msra.org.au
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References:

1. Avonex® Approved Product Information, January 2016
<https://www.ebs.tga.gov.au/ebs/picmi/picmirepository.nsf/pdf?OpenAgent&id=CP-2011-PI-03646-3>
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Note:

MS Australia does not recommend any specific disease-modifying treatment for people living with MS. Decisions about any treatments, taking into consideration the potential benefits and side effects for each individual's circumstances, should be made in careful consultation with the person's neurologist.

The information supplied in this document is collated from material provided by the relevant pharmaceutical company, MIMS (<http://www.mims.com.au>) and MS Research Australia.