

Treatments for MS:

Betaferon[®] (interferon beta-1b)

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 Betaferon[®] and how does it work?

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

How is Betaferon[®] administered?

Betaferon[®] is given as a subcutaneous (under the skin) injection every second day. A month's supply consists of fifteen injections.

Bayer also offers a choice of autoinjectors to assist patients with managing regular injections as well as a patient App to help with injection reminders and rotation of injection sites.

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

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

The more common side effects include:

Injection site reactions

These include: redness, swelling, bruising, discolouration, pain, itching, allergy, skin cell-death where the injection was given (these may be reduced by administration with an autoinjector - please consult your doctor for further information – also, these tend to be worst at the start of treatment and become less of a problem over time - if you experience multiple skin sores, very severe sores or breakage of the skin associated with swelling or discharge from the injection site you should discuss this with your doctor - it may be necessary to stop using Betaferon[®] until these are healed)

Other common side effects

These include flu-like symptoms including fever, chills, muscular pain, headache, tiredness, painful joints, general feeling of being unwell, or sweating (these may be relieved if paracetamol or ibuprofen is taken when the injection is given), also nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, constipation, abdominal pain, dizziness, anxiety, nervousness, infected sinus and conjunctivitis..

Tell your doctor if you notice anything else that is making you feel unwell.

How much does Betaferon® cost?

Betaferon® has been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration and is available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). Please discuss with your neurologist whether Betaferon® is the right treatment for you. Your doctor will need to gain an authority to prescribe the medication for you, and only a neurologist can write your first prescription. There are a number of criteria you must meet before your doctor can obtain authority to write this prescription.

Details of the criteria you must meet to get Betaferon® through the PBS can be accessed from the official PBS website at:

<http://www.pbs.gov.au/medicine/item/8101J>

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 Betaferon® through the PBS, for example if you are a visitor from overseas, your neurologist may write a private prescription. This means 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

Most pharmacies will not keep Betaferon® in stock. Instead they will place an order with the manufacturer to have stock delivered especially for you. This means it is important to let your pharmacist know a few days before you need the medication.

Betaferon® needs to be stored below 25°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.

Bayer Australia runs a toll free helpline and Patient Support Program called Betaplus® which you can contact at 1800 557 960 for further assistance.

In Australia, Betaferon® is manufactured by:
Bayer Australia Ltd.
875 Pacific Hwy, Pymble NSW 2073

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. Betaferon® Approved Product Information, October 2016
<https://www.ebs.tga.gov.au/ebs/picmi/picmirepository.nsf/pdf?OpenAgent&id=CP-2010-PI-03413-3>
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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.