



# Treatments for MS:

## Copaxone® (glatiramer acetate)

**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.**

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### What is Copaxone® and how does it work with MS?

The active ingredient in Copaxone® is glatiramer acetate. Glatiramer acetate is a mix of four amino acids which form a protein very similar to the basic protein which makes up myelin. Glatiramer acetate appears to block myelin-specific autoimmune responses. Researchers are still investigating exactly how this process works. Glatiramer acetate is a different class of medication to the interferons.

Clinical trials found that Copaxone® (glatiramer acetate) 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)<sup>1</sup>.

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### How is Copaxone® administered?

Copaxone® is available in two dosing formats:

- Copaxone® 40mg/mL administered three times a week by subcutaneous (under the skin) injection (12 pre-filled syringes per pack) and;
  - Copaxone® 20mg/mL administered once daily by subcutaneous injection (28 pre-filled syringes per pack). **Note: The 20mg/mL dose will not be available after 1 July 2019.**
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### What are the potential side effects of Copaxone® treatment?

Copaxone® helps most people with MS, but it may have side effects in some people. Tell your doctor if you notice any of the following and they worry you: pain, redness, itching, hardening of the skin or an infection at the site where you have injected yourself, nausea (feeling sick), pain in the joints, sore muscles, feeling of weakness, dizziness and constipation.

Some patients may experience a side effect known as the Immediate Post Injection Reaction. This reaction consists of the following symptoms: reddening of the face and/or neck, chest pain or tightness, feeling your heart beat quickly (heart palpitations), anxiety and difficulty in breathing. These are mild side effects of this medicine and usually are short-lived. Some patients may experience only one episode during the treatment period.

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 Copaxone® cost?

Copaxone® has been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and is available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). Please discuss with your neurologist whether Copaxone® is the right treatment for you. Your doctor will need to obtain 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 receive authority to write this prescription.

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

<http://www.pbs.gov.au/medicine/item/10416F> - 40mg/mL

<http://www.pbs.gov.au/medicine/item/8726G> - 20mg/mL (deleted from the PBS from 1 July 2019)

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](http://www.medicare.gov.au)

If you are not eligible for Copaxone® 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.

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## General information

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

Copaxone® 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.

Copaxone® is manufactured by:  
Teva Pharma Australia Pty Ltd,  
Level 2, 37 Epping Road, Macquarie Park, Sydney, NSW 2113  
Medical Information: 1800 AU TEVA (1800 28 8382)

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## 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](http://www.msaustralia.org.au)
  - MS Research Australia provides information on the latest research and clinical trials at [www.msra.org.au](http://www.msra.org.au)
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## References

1. Copaxone® Approved Product Information, February 2015  
<https://www.ebs.tga.gov.au/ebs/picmi/picmirepository.nsf/pdf?OpenAgent&id=CP-2015-PI-01465-1&d=2017061416114622483>
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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.