

Supportive care

Octreotide injection

Octreotide is used within supportive and palliative care to reduce symptoms from bowel obstruction, or high output of fluid from an ileostomy or a fistula. The possible benefits of treatment vary; your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment.

We may be recommending this medicine to be used for a condition it was not originally designed for; so you may find that there are some differences between the hospital and the manufacturer's information. This leaflet will inform you of the reason(s) why you are taking this medicine and to highlight any other information. This should be read in conjunction with the manufacturer's patient information leaflet.

What is octreotide?

Octreotide is a synthetic hormone that works similarly to a naturally occurring hormone, somatostatin, which is found throughout the body. They both stop the action of other hormones within the body and that can help reduce stomach and bowel secretions.

There is evidence that octreotide is safe and can be effective for the treatment of symptoms of nausea and vomiting caused by bowel obstruction in patients with cancer. It can also be used to reduce the high output of fluid from an ileostomy to help maintain hydration.

How does octreotide work?

Octreotide works by reducing bowel secretions and gastro-intestinal motility. It does this by blocking other hormones found within the gastro-intestinal system which stimulate bowel secretion, bowel blood flow and gastro-intestinal motility. It does not permanently stop these hormones working; they will return to normal if your doctor no longer thinks octreotide is required and it is stopped.

When is octreotide prescribed?

Octreotide is usually prescribed when other measures to reduce nausea and vomiting due to bowel obstruction or high output from an ileostomy or fistula have not helped. It may be prescribed by itself, or in combination with other medications to reduce symptoms of nausea and vomiting. It has other medical uses e.g. treatment of hormone-secreting tumours but this is not why the supportive care team is using this medication.

How is octreotide given?

Octreotide is always given as an injection. There are several different strengths of octreotide injection available from The Christie Pharmacy, and it is available as a vial or as a pre-filled syringe which is preferred for patients who administer their own injections. The supportive care team will select the most appropriate product for you.



The short-acting drug octreotide can be given in multiple daily doses by injection under the skin. Octreotide can be painful when it is injected under the skin; however, this is less likely to be a problem when it is administered in a portable battery operated pump (syringe pump) as an infusion given over 24 hours.

Octreotide may be given alone in a syringe pump, or in combination with other medicines. A district nurse will attend your home daily to administer your medication, and this will be arranged for you before you leave the hospital.

If you are injecting the medicine yourself, you will be trained by a nurse on how to administer octreotide correctly. The following points may help reduce pain associated with injection:

- Let the injection warm to room temperature before use.
- Rotate injection sites.
- Avoid hard or red areas and areas of tenderness or bruising.

Gastro-intestinal undesirable effects may be reduced by administering octreotide between meals or at bedtime.

Often the injection is given for a short period of time until your symptoms are under control; however some patients may receive it for as long as it helps control their symptoms. If you do not tolerate treatment, or do not feel you the octreotide is helpful for treating your symptoms, your specialist should review and discuss stopping the treatment with you.

What dose of octreotide is usually prescribed?

Octreotide is usually started off in a low dose and then increased gradually. This is because like any medicine, octreotide has a number of side effects. Starting off with a low dose and slowly increasing it allows your body to get used to these effects. It also allows your doctor to see how well your symptoms are responding to octreotide. How much octreotide you will need depends upon how well it is working for you and if you are having any side effects.

How well or quickly does octreotide work?

For some people octreotide can work very quickly (within a few days). For other people it may take slightly longer of taking reasonable doses before their symptoms improve. Some patients do not find octreotide to be helpful. It is not possible to tell who will respond to octreotide.

Who cannot take octreotide?

Most patients can use octreotide safely; however talk to your doctor or specialist nurse immediately if you:

- are allergic to octreotide, lanreotide or any of the ingredients in this medicine
- know that you have gallstones now, or have had them in the past; tell your doctor, as prolonged use of octreotide may result in gallstone formation.
- have problems with your blood sugar levels, either too high (diabetes) or too low (hypoglycaemia)
- have a history of vitamin B12 deprivation; your doctor may wish to check your vitamin B12 level periodically
- Hypothyroidism

What are the possible risks or side effects?

The most common side effects of octreotide are pain at the site of injection, headache, dry mouth, flatulence, nausea, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, constipation, changes in blood sugar levels, bradycardia (slow heart rate). If your treatment is long-term (months/years), there is a risk of gallstones (10-20% of patients). Hypothyroidism has also been reported with longer-term use. Please read the manufacturer's patient information leaflet for a full list of side effects. If you are concerned about any side effects please talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Can I take other medicines if I'm prescribed octreotide?

Octreotide interacts with very few medicines. The main ones are ciclosporin, bromocriptine, and telotristat ethyl. Octreotide can also reduce levels of vitamin B12. Before you are discharged from hospital, or the outpatient clinic, your medicines will be reviewed by your specialist doctor or nurse, and pharmacy team to ensure no interactions are present.

What is the length of treatment?

The length of treatment will depend on why you were started on octreotide and how well it works. You will be reviewed periodically to assess whether your octreotide can be reduced or discontinued. It may be necessary for your doctor or specialist nurse to change the dose during treatment. You can take octreotide for as long as it helps your symptoms if you are not having any side effects.

You should avoid abrupt withdrawal of octreotide as it may make your symptoms worse.

How do I get further prescriptions for octreotide?

Octreotide is a specialist medicine in supportive and palliative care, and depending on local funding arrangements, GPs may or may not be able to prescribe it in the community.

If you are attending The Christie supportive care or pain clinic for follow up, octreotide injection may be dispensed by The Christie Pharmacy. You should be given sufficient supply to last you until your next review. You will also require a prescription for a supply of sodium chloride 0.9% injection, or water for injection which is used to dilute the octreotide, so it is less painful to infuse or inject.

If you run out of octreotide injection and are unable to get a further supply, you must contact the supportive care team for advice.

What is the plan for follow up?

Follow up will vary from patient to patient. The supportive care or pain team will manage the initiation of your octreotide, and ongoing prescribing once an effective dose is established. We will share the plan for the prescribing and follow up of octreotide with the appropriate practitioners (e.g. GPs, community Macmillan nurses etc). You may be reviewed in the supportive care or pain clinic on a regular basis to ensure octreotide is still the right treatment for you.

If you are unable to attend The Christie, we will liaise with the local palliative care team or GP to take over octreotide prescribing. You will be given a supply of octreotide injection at discharge. The amount you are given will depend on when you are next due to be reviewed by the supportive care team, or your local community team, if they agree to prescribe.

Will I need any special monitoring with octreotide?

If you are diabetic, your blood glucose levels may be affected and you may need dose adjustment of your insulin and/or oral anti-diabetic medication. Your liver function will be tested periodically, and your thyroid function should be checked on a regular basis if you have hypothyroidism.

Can I drive while taking octreotide?

If your physical ability to drive is not impaired, you may continue to do so whilst taking octreotide. However, you should inform the DVLA and your car insurance provider that you are taking the medication, inform them of your diagnosis and of any physical impairment that may affect your ability to be a safe driver.

Can I drink alcohol while taking octreotide?

You can drink alcohol in moderation whilst taking octreotide, but it is important to remember that it has been given to reduce gastric secretions and may be less effective. Regular alcohol intake can also irritate the lining of the stomach, and increase the risk of gastrointestinal (GI) side effects.

How should octreotide injection be stored?

Keep the injection in the outer carton in order to protect the product from light. Store in a refrigerator (2°C - 8°C). Do not freeze. If you have any queries regarding storage of octreotide, you can contact the pharmacy for advice.

Keep this medicine out of the sight and reach of children and pets. Do not use this medicine after the expiry date which is stated on the carton and label. The injection should only be used if it is clear and free of particles.

Do not throw away any medicines via wastewater or household waste. Ask your pharmacist how to throw away medicines you no longer use. These measures will help protect the environment.

Who should I contact if I need urgent advice about octreotide?

Monday to Friday, 9:00am - 5:00pm contact the supportive care team on **0161 446 3559**, or **0161 446 8493**.

During the evening or at weekends and bank holidays, if you have any queries, contact The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658**.

Useful contacts:

- Secretary: supportive care team **0161 446 3559**
- Secretary: pain team **0161 446 8493**
- Supportive care pharmacist **0161 446 3443**
- The Christie Pharmacy **0161 446 3432 / 3433**

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week