

# HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE

Other names: Plaquenil®



**Important note:** The following information is intended to add to, not replace, the knowledge and judgment of your doctor, pharmacist or other health care professional.

## What is hydroxychloroquine used for?

Hydroxychloroquine is mainly used for lupus erythematosus and rheumatoid arthritis. It works by reducing the activity of the body's immune system, to reduce pain and inflammation. After you start taking hydroxychloroquine it may take several weeks before you notice any improvement in your symptoms. It can help slow down the progress of the disease but will not cure it.

## When to take this medicine

Hydroxychloroquine is best taken at meal times. Swallow tablets whole with a little water. Always follow the instructions given to you by your doctor.

## If you miss a dose

If you miss a dose of this medicine take it as soon as possible except when it is close to the time of your next dose. If it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and return to your regular dosing schedule. You should not take two doses at the same time.

## Side Effects

Unfortunately as well as having good effects, most medicines have some effects on your body that are unwanted. These are called *side effects*.

Call your doctor **immediately** if you have any of these side effects:

- any changes in your vision (eye sight)
- hearing loss
- fever, chills, mouth ulcers, sore throat or unusual bruising
- muscle weakness

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you have these side effects:

- stomach problems (nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea or cramps)
- dizziness
- ringing in the ears
- headache
- skin rash
- hair loss

This list of side effects is **not** complete. Tell your doctor or pharmacist if any of these side effects are of a concern to you.

## Other Medicines

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking any other medicines including herbal or complementary products and medicines you can buy without a prescription.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking:

- Digoxin (hydroxychloroquine can increase the digoxin concentration in the body)
- Medicines for diabetes. Hydroxychloroquine may increase the risk of having low blood sugar levels or “a hypo”. Doses of diabetes medicines such as insulin may occasionally need to be decreased.
- Medicines for depression
- Antacids for heartburn or indigestion (e.g. Gaviscon, Mylanta) can reduce the absorption of hydroxychloroquine. It is best to take antacids either 4 hours before or after hydroxychloroquine.

## While you are taking hydroxychloroquine

Before you start hydroxychloroquine let your doctor know if you have glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency.

You will need regular eye examinations when on hydroxychloroquine. Any changes in your vision can be reduced by wearing sunglasses while you are out in the sun.

Your doctor may ask for occasional blood tests to check for any effects in the blood while on hydroxychloroquine.

Tell your doctor if you fall pregnant or plan on becoming pregnant while on hydroxychloroquine.

## Storage

Keep all medicines out of reach of children.

**Read this leaflet and discuss any questions you have about your medicines with your doctor or pharmacist.**