

Alpha interferon

How does this medicine work?

Interferons (in-ter-**feer**-ons) change the immune system. Interferons are naturally-occurring proteins that stimulate the body's immune system when disease is present. A dose of interferon adds to a type of interferon normally produced by the body. Interferons may be useful in treating hepatitis, some forms of cancer, and hemangiomas.

How is the medicine given?

Interferon is given as an injection either into the vein (IV), under the skin (often called "Sub-Q"), or into the muscle (IM). It can be given in the hospital, clinic, or home.

What are the side effects?

Children usually have fewer side effects than adults.

- Expected
- flu-like symptoms, such as:
 - fever
 - chills
 - body aches
 - headache
 - fatigue
- Occasional
- nausea, vomiting
 - diarrhea
 - taste changes
 - loss of appetite
 - depression
 - hair loss
 - rash
 - spastic diplegia (stiffness in both legs)
 - lower blood pressure

Rare

- faster heart rate
- irregular heartbeat
- chest pain
- shortness of breath
- confusion
- numbness of hands and feet
- low blood counts
- low calcium level
- high potassium level
- back pain
- seizures
- psychosis

When should I call the clinic?

- fever or chills not relieved with acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®)
- continued vomiting or diarrhea
- cough
- chest pain
- shortness of breath
- bleeding
- unusual bruising
- irregular heartbeat
- problems using hands or feet
- confusion
- seizures
- signs of allergic reaction:
 - sudden rash or hives
 - itching
 - wheezing
 - trouble breathing - **call 911**

What else do I need to know?

In children with bleeding disorders or platelet counts less than 50,000, this medicine should not be given sub-Q (just under the skin) or IM (into the muscle).

Interferon should not be given to children or teenagers with a history of depression or suicidal behavior.

Side effects can be decreased by giving the dose at night.

Flu-like symptoms usually resolve after repeated doses. Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (such as Advil®) can be used to prevent or reduce fever and headaches.

Use caution when driving or operating machinery while on interferon because changes in mental status can occur.

You and your child should know the names of all the medicines he or she is taking. **Share this information** with anyone involved in your child's care.

Do not change brands of interferon. **This may change the dose.**

Check with the doctor, nurse practitioner, or pharmacist before giving **any** other prescription or non-prescription medicines, herbs, or vitamins.

Always make sure you have enough medicine on hand. Each time you refill your prescription, check to see how many refills are left. If no refills are left, the pharmacy will need 2 or 3 days to contact the clinic to renew the prescription.

Check the label for the expiration date. Keep alpha interferon refrigerated, whether dry or mixed. Once mixed, it is good for 1 month if kept in the refrigerator but for only 24 hours at room temperature.

If too much or the wrong kind of medicine is taken, call the hematology/oncology clinic right away. If your child is unconscious or has a seizure, **call 911.**

Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child but provides general information. If you have any questions, please call the hematology/oncology clinic or pharmacy

For more reading material about this and other health topics, please call or visit the Family Resource Center library, or visit our Web site: www.childrensmn.org.

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