

Information Sheet

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COPAXONE

What is Copaxone?

Copaxone is the brand name for glatiramer acetate injection. Copaxone is a mixture of four amino acids, the natural building blocks of proteins in the body. Copaxone is the first non-steroidal, non-interferon MS drug therapy available to people living with relapsing-remitting MS.

Who is prescribed Copaxone?

Copaxone treats patients who have experienced a well-defined first clinical episode and are determined to be at high risk of developing clinically definite MS (CDMS). Copaxone reduces the frequency of relapses in ambulatory patients, (i.e. who can walk unaided) in relapsing-remitting MS. Copaxone is not indicated in primary or secondary progressive MS.

How is Copaxone administered and what is the dosing regimen?

People who are prescribed Copaxone administer a subcutaneous (under the skin) injection once a day with a pre-filled syringe. Everything needed to administer therapy comes in one, ready-to-use syringe. You can administer Copaxone yourself, and specially trained nurses will show you how to inject.

How does Copaxone help my MS?

Copaxone acts to help improve the symptoms of MS. It is indicated for reducing the frequency of relapses in relapsing-remitting MS. Copaxone modifies the way in which the body's immune defence system works by regulating and adjusting the immune response to stop it from attacking the neurons.

Will I be given support whilst taking Copaxone?

Your neurologists, MS nurses and MS Society will provide help and information. In addition, there is a patient support programme called "My Support Team" (MS Team). This programme is run by a team of specially trained nurses who will visit you at home

in order to help you get started on treatment and who will provide training and help with injection techniques or other queries related to Copaxone. Once you commence Copaxone treatment you will have a direct phone number for your support nurse so that you can make contact as and when you need it. The programme is open and free of charge to anyone with MS who has been prescribed Copaxone.

What are the side effects?

All medications can cause side-effects. The most common side effects occurring shortly after injecting Copaxone are:

- Immediate post-injection reaction (flushing, chest pain, breathlessness, palpitations)
- Injection-site reactions (redness, pain, swelling, itchiness)
 - Rash (red spots like nettle-rash)
 - Swelling of the eyelids, face or lips
 - Sudden wheeziness or shortness of breath
 - Convulsions (fits)
 - Fainting

If you experience any of these symptoms stop taking your Copaxone and tell your doctor immediately or go to the nearest emergency department as you may need urgent medical attention.

Other common side-effects of Copaxone include:

- Anxiety, depression, agitation, confusion, sleepiness
- Dizziness, headache, memory loss, fainting, visual problems
- Poor appetite, nausea, diarrhoea or constipation
- Increased sweating
- Rash
- Joint pain
- Generalised weakness, chills or feeling unwell
- Generalised swelling, itchiness or bruising
- Cough, cold, hay fever-like symptoms
- Problems with urination and/or menstrual cycle

Copaxone does not create neutralising antibodies (NABs) that may neutralise a drug's beneficial effects.

How do I know if it is working?

When you start taking Copaxone you might not notice any visible difference. However, the way Copaxone works means that it may be preventing your MS from relapsing.

You should talk to your neurologist about what you should expect from your therapy. None of the therapies available to treat MS are cures. Once you have started on Copaxone you may still experience some attacks, but this does not mean that the therapy is not effective. Even if you cannot see immediate results from your therapy, Copaxone may enable you to function better than you would have without it.¹

How is it stored?

Keep Copaxone package in a safe place that is out of the sight and reach of children.³ The Copaxone package should be refrigerated (2–8°) on receipt. Do not freeze.³

If you cannot refrigerate Copaxone, the prefilled syringes can be stored at room temperature (15–30°C) for up to one month.

Do I continue taking Copaxone if I am thinking of becoming pregnant?

Copaxone should not be used during pregnancy. If you are planning pregnancy please discuss this with your neurologist.

Can I travel with Copaxone?

Copaxone therapy can be easily incorporated into all parts of your life, including travel. The following information may be helpful when travelling:

- Copaxone can be left at room temperature for up to one month. For longer trips, make every attempt to keep Copaxone refrigerated. Travel kits are available from the Copaxone support nurse. This allows Copaxone to be conveniently stored with a cooling agent.
- For short trips of less than one month, the travel box or the Autoject pouch supplied by the Copaxone support nurse, are a convenient way to store supplies when travelling.

How long can I take Copaxone for?

Managing MS requires a long-term commitment by the patient, and Copaxone must be taken as prescribed to get the maximum benefit from the drug. The duration of treatment must be determined in consultation with your neurologist and at the present time it is not known for how long treatment should last.

How will I pay for my Copaxone?

If you are prescribed Copaxone it will be covered by the High Tech Drug (HTD) Scheme. In this scheme, medicines are purchased by the Health Service Executive and supplied through community pharmacies. The cost of the medicines and patient care fees are paid by the Primary Care Reimbursement Service. For more information see: http://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/PCRS/About_PCRS/.

People with MS are eligible for cover under the Long-Term Illness (LTI) scheme. You will be supplied with a LTI book, which allows you to get drugs, medicines and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of your illness, free of charge. It does not depend on your income or other circumstances. For more information see: http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find_a_Service/entitlements/Long_Term_Illness

Sources: Questions and Answers: All About Copaxone, sanofi-aventis Ireland. IE.COP.07.06.26 Copaxone 20 mg/ml Solution for Injection, Pre-filled Syringe. Summary of Product Characteristics and Patient Information Leaflet, available online at www.medicines.ie

Disclaimer: MS Ireland provides information to the MS Community on an array of topics associated with MS. This information is for reference purposes only and medical advice should always be sought before any treatment or intervention is tried.

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