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.

What is Lemtrada® (alemtuzumab) and how does it work?

Lemtrada® is in a class of medications called monoclonal antibodies, which means it can bind specifically to molecules present on the surface of cells.

Lemtrada® works by binding to CD52 molecules which are present on the surface of B and T cells of the immune system and once it is bound, the body’s own immune system destroys those cells. Since B and T cells are known to play a role in the disease process of MS, depleting B and T cells in the circulation may slow the disease process in some individuals.

Lemtrada® is used to treat relapsing forms of MS in adults with active disease. Lemtrada® is not recommended for patients with inactive disease or those who are stable on their current therapy.

Lemtrada® is a liquid preparation which is given by intravenous infusion in two treatment courses one year apart. The first course consists of infusions given over five consecutive days, the second course consists of infusions given over three days. Due to potential side effects, once you have received Lemtrada® you will need to undergo regular monitoring so that any side effects can be detected and treated promptly. Monitoring must continue for four years after the last infusion.

In clinical trials, Lemtrada® has been shown to:

- Reduce the frequency of relapses when compared with interferon beta treatment 1,2
- Delay the progression of disability in some people when compared to interferon beta treatment 2

The treatment does have side effects. Common side effects include infusion-associated reactions (such as headache, rash and nausea), lowered blood cell counts and infections.

Serious autoimmune side effects include:

- An overactive or underactive thyroid gland, leading to thyroid-related side effects. These side effects are treatable but can require careful monitoring and lifelong thyroid medication.

- A blood clotting disorder known as immune thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP), which is caused by low numbers of platelets in the blood. This can lead to internal bleeding. ITP can be fatal, but monitoring strategies enable ITP to be detected early and treated appropriately.

There is an increase in the risk of infection with Lemtrada treatment, though the incidence of serious infections in clinical trials was low.

Lemtrada® has not been tested in women who are pregnant. Women of childbearing age should use effective birth control measures when receiving a course of treatment with Lemtrada® and for 4 months following that course of treatment. Women who are pregnant, planning pregnancy or breastfeeding should seek advice from their doctor.
How is Lemtrada® supplied and how much does it cost?

Lemtrada® was approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration for the treatment of MS in December 2013 and entered into the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG).

It has also been approved for listing on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and will be available for purchase from April 1, 2015. Please discuss with your neurologist whether Lemtrada® is the right treatment for you.

At present, Lemtrada® is the cost of the co-payment.

For more information on this treatment or other MS treatments

- Speak to your neurologist about what treatment best suits your individual circumstances.
- For more information on Lemtrada® visit http://www.msra.org.au/intravenous-treatment-alemtuzumab-good-results
- MS Nurses at the state MS societies can also provide information and support about immunotherapy options. Visit www.msaustralia.org.au for more information and contact details for state MS Societies.
- MS Research Australia provides information on the latest research and clinical trials in MS. Visit www.msra.org.au for more information.
- Making Sense of MS Research provides plain language summaries of independent, high quality research about MS treatments. Visit www.makingsenseofmsresearch.org.au

In Australia Lemtrada® is supplied by:

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Macquarie Park
NSW - 2113

For information about MS and MS Australia services visit www.msaustralia.org.au

References


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