



PATIENT FACT SHEET

Leflunomide (Arava)



WHAT IS IT?

Leflunomide (Arava) is a drug approved to treat adults with moderate to severe rheumatoid arthritis.

It belongs to a class of medications called disease modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs). Leflunomide is often used to treat rheumatoid arthritis alone or in

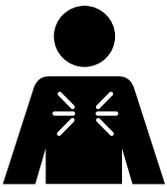
combination with other DMARDs. Leflunomide blocks the formation of DNA, which is important for replicating cells, such as those in the immune system. It suppresses the immune system to reduce inflammation that causes pain and swelling in rheumatoid arthritis.



HOW TO TAKE IT

Leflunomide is usually given as a 20mg tablet once a day. Doctors will often prescribe a “loading dose” to be taken when the medicine is first prescribed. The loading dose of leflunomide is usually 100mg (or five 20mg tablets) once weekly for 3 weeks or 100mg a day

for the first 3 days after starting leflunomide. It may take several weeks after starting leflunomide to experience an improvement in joint pain or swelling. Complete benefits may not be experienced until 6-12 weeks after starting the medication.



SIDE EFFECTS

The most common side effect of leflunomide is diarrhea, which occurs in approximately 20 percent of patients. This symptom frequently improves with time or by taking a medication to prevent diarrhea. If diarrhea persists, the dose of leflunomide may need to be reduced. Less common side effects include nausea,

stomach pain, indigestion, rash, and hair loss. In fewer than 10 percent of patients, leflunomide can cause abnormal liver function tests or decreased blood cell or platelet counts. Rarely, this drug may cause lung problems, such as cough, shortness of breath or lung injury.



TELL YOUR DOCTOR

If you are pregnant, considering pregnancy, or have recently given birth, you should discuss this with your doctor before beginning the medication. Breastfeeding while taking leflunomide is not recommended. Men taking leflunomide who wish to have a child also should talk with their physicians about how to discontinue the medication. The risk of liver injury may be increased if leflunomide is combined with other medications. Be sure to tell your doctor about all medications you are taking, including over-the-counter drugs and natural remedies, as

these may reduce the effectiveness of leflunomide. Any medications that can affect the liver should be used with caution with leflunomide. It is important that you have regular blood tests, including those for liver function, while taking this medication. You should not take leflunomide if you have a pre-existing liver disease, such as hepatitis or cirrhosis. Be sure to discuss any vaccines with your doctor before receiving them. Also, be sure to notify your doctor before any surgeries while taking this medication, as Leflunomide can increase the risk of post-operative infections and/or slow the healing of your wounds.