



LUPUS MEDICINES

DMARDS: PLAQUENIL

Questions answered:

- What kind of medicines are DMARDS?
- What is a commonly used antimalarial?
- How does Plaquenil work?
- What are the benefits of taking Plaquenil?
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What kind of medicines are DMARDS?

- Some medicines slow down the arthritis and prevent the joint damage that can be a result of lupus. Doctors call these **DMARDS**. This stands for Disease-Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs. Antimalarials are one type of DMARD. While they are also used to prevent malaria, they have also been proven to be useful in managing the symptoms of Lupus.

What is a commonly used antimalarial?

- One of the most commonly used antimalarials in lupus patients is hydroxychloroquine. The brand name is Plaquenil.

How does Plaquenil work?

- The exact way Plaquenil assists in the treatment of autoimmune diseases such as lupus is not known, however it is believed that the drug affects the communication between immune system cells.

What are the benefits of taking Plaquenil?

- Plaquenil relieves pain and swelling and prevents damage to joints.

How long does Plaquenil take to work?

- Plaquenil works very slowly. In 1 to 3 months you should start to feel better. You may continue to get better for up to 1 year.
- Most people who take Plaquenil also take other medicines for pain and stiffness.

How do you take Plaquenil?

- You take Plaquenil as 1 or 2 times a day. Take the pills with food or milk.
- Your body weight will tell your doctor what dose is safe for you.

What do you do if you forget to take your Plaquenil?

- If you miss a dose of Plaquenil, do not make it up or double your next dose. Wait until the next scheduled time, and take your usual dose.

What are the side effects of Plaquenil?

- The most common side effects are diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, headache, dizziness, skin rash or black spots when you look at things.
- Most side effects will go away when your body gets use to the medicine.
- Tell your doctor if you have these side effects. A lower dose may stop them.
- Do not lower the dose on your own.
- Plaquenil stays in your body for about 3 months. If you must stop it, it will take a while for the side effects to go away.
- You should have an eye examination every year to prevent a very rare but serious eye problem. Less than one person in 5,000 develops the problem. Only an eye doctor can see if you have a problem with your retina. Almost always the damage will go away if it is found early and the medicine stopped.
- You should not take this medicine if you already have problems with the retinas in your eyes. You should not take this if you have an allergy to antimalarial medications.
- You should not take Plaquenil if you are pregnant, or are breast-feeding a baby.

What do you do if your Plaquenil does not work?

- After several months, your doctor will check your joints for swelling and see how you feel. If you still have pain with your daily activities, then you and your doctor should think about trying another medicine.

Be sure to talk to your rheumatologist if you have any other questions or concerns.