

Anagrelide

a publication of the MPD Support Charity

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet is for people with myeloproliferative disorders (MPDs). It gives information about the medicine anagrelide.

In this leaflet you will learn:

- How anagrelide works
- The benefits and drawbacks of taking anagrelide
- How to take and store anagrelide
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- How to feel your best while taking anagrelide

The leaflet is intended to give you the information required to aid your decision about taking anagrelide, or as a reference for people already taking this medication.

It is important that in addition to this leaflet you read the information provided with your medicine.

What is anagrelide?

Anagrelide is a medication used to treat myeloproliferative disorders (MPDs).

The drug is known by several names. It also goes under the brand name Xagrid® or Agrylin®. Anagrelide can be used to treat all three main types of MPDs: polycythaemia vera (PV), essential thrombocythaemia (ET) and myelofibrosis (MF). It is most frequently used to treat ET. If you need more information about the three types of MPDs you can learn more on our website at www.mpd-support.co.uk

Anagrelide is currently available in 0.5mg (500mcg) white capsules. It is taken by mouth.

How does anagrelide work?

Anagrelide acts to reduce production of platelets in our bodies. Platelets are produced in the bone marrow by stem cells, which are “master” cells - they act in response to stimulus from hormones in our bodies and can develop into any type of blood cell: red cell, white cell or platelet. Stem cells pass through several development stages as they mature into fully functional blood cells. Once mature, they exit the bone marrow and enter the blood stream.

Scientists believe that anagrelide works by reducing the production of new platelets from cells called megakaryocytes, the bone marrow cells responsible for producing platelets. We believe that anagrelide interferes with proteins at the surface of the megakaryocyte cell and this prevents development of new platelets.

When you take anagrelide the number of platelet cells in your body decreases. This in turn allows your blood to flow more freely and you will be less likely to suffer a blood clot or thrombosis.

Anagrelide is not a chemotherapy drug; however, some hospitals classify anagrelide as a form of chemotherapy because it interferes with cell development, and the prescribing regulations are similar to those governing a chemotherapy drug. You may be asked to sign a consent to treatment form before you start taking this drug for this reason.

How can anagrelide treat my MPD?

Anagrelide is currently recommended for use in individuals who are unable to tolerate other drugs used to treat MPDs. It is mainly used to treat high platelet counts in ET but can also be used in combination with other drugs (such as hydroxycarbamide) or in combination with venesection for PV.

Anagrelide has the advantage over other therapies in that it will only reduce the platelet count. This means that red and white blood cells counts will not be effected.

Reducing the platelet count can reduce the risk of experiencing a blood clot or a bleed. It may also help to reduce any symptoms experienced as a result of having too many

platelets such as headache, visual problems, fatigue, tingling in fingers and toes, bleeding or itching.

Are there any drawbacks?

As with all medications you may experience side effects whilst taking Anagrelide. These are listed in the side effects section below.

You will need frequent blood tests and monitoring whilst taking anagrelide to ensure that the dose is correct for you.

Anagrelide only reduces platelets. If you have elevated red cells or white cells you may either require another drug or venesection therapy to control this.

A small number of people will not respond to anagrelide or may develop a resistance to anagrelide (so that it no longer works) over a period of years, requiring a switch to another treatment.

Anagrelide may not be as good as some other therapies at slowing the development of myelofibrosis in patients with ET or PT.

Are there any side effects?

Most people taking this drug tolerate it well and have few side effects. However, it is important that you inform your doctor or nurse if you are experiencing any of the side effects listed below or any other new symptoms, even if they are mild.

Anagrelide can cause episodes of fast heart rate, so your haematologist or nurse will check your heart rate before you start treatment.

Very common side effects

Approximately more than one person in 10 (more than 10%) of people taking anagrelide will experience some of these side effects:

- Headache

Less common side effects

Approximately one person in 100 up to one person in 10 (1-10%) of people taking anagrelide will experience some of these common side effects:

- Anaemia
- Fluid retention (swollen hands and feet)
- Dizziness
- Palpitations
- Fast heart beat (tachycardia)
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Stomach pains
- Excessive wind
- Vomiting
- Rash
- Fatigue

If you experience any of the symptoms above please inform your doctor or nurse.

Uncommon side effects

Uncommon side effects affecting approximately one person in 100 to one person in 1000 (0.1-1%) include:

- Weight loss
- Numbness
- Sleep disturbances
- Depression
- Confusion
- Heart failure
- High blood pressure
- Muscle pain
- Back pain
- Joint pain

Rare side effects

Rare side effects affecting approximately one person in 1000 to one person in 10,000 (0.01-0.1%) include:

- Weight gain
- Sleepiness
- Reduced coordination
- Difficulty speaking or forming words
- Migraine

- Angina/chest pain
- Heart attack
- Enlargement or inflammation of the heart
- Drop in blood pressure when standing
- Ringing in ears (tinnitus)
- Double vision
- Increased pressure in arteries of lungs
- Abnormal substances and inflammation in the lungs
- Inflammation of the intestine
- Bleeding gums
- Dry skin
- Increased need to pass urine at night
- Reduced kidney function
- Pain
- Flu like symptoms
- Loss of strength/weakness

Taking anagrelide

How to take anagrelide

- Take either before or after food, in the morning or evening
- Swallow whole with plenty of water
- Do not split the capsule
- Take at the same time every day

Dosage

Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will give dosage instructions. You will be started on a low dose. Your dose may be increased based on how your body responds. He or she may recommend you split your dose to take throughout the day. Please be sure to follow the directions precisely.

Keeping track

It may be helpful to keep a record to remember when to take your tablets and to record any side effects. You may be given a diary or booklet for this purpose.

Storage and disposal of anagrelide

- Store in a dry place at room temperature.

- Anagrelide can be dangerous to others. Keep your capsules in a secure location well out of the reach of children and pets.
- Return any unused capsules to your local pharmacy or hospital. Do not dispose of them in the bin or flush them down the toilet.
- Do not use tablets after the expiry date which is stated on the packaging.

What should I expect when I begin treatment?

How fast does it work?

Anagrelide can take several weeks to start having an effect on your cells. You will probably not feel any benefits until your counts are under control.

How will I feel?

As your blood counts reduce you may notice that you experience fewer symptoms. Most people taking this drug tolerate it well and have relatively few side effects, and side effects usually become less noticeable over time.

Will I need follow up?

You will need more frequent blood tests during the first weeks of treatment to determine how your body is responding to the medication. Once your body begins to adjust to the treatment you will need less frequent checks, perhaps every two to three months. Your nurse or haematologist may check your kidney and liver and heart function with blood tests or scans.

Can I take other medicines or vitamins, herbal supplements or remedies if I am taking anagrelide?

Whenever you take anagrelide (or in fact any medication), it is important to inform your medical advisors about all other medications you are taking: this includes medicines prescribed for you as well as any vitamins, herbal supplements or remedies bought in chemists. Always provide the names of these medications and remedies to the hospital doctors, GPs, nurses and pharmacists who are treating you, prescribing additional medications or giving you advice. It can be very helpful to carry a list of the names and dosages of all your medicines to show to your doctor or nurse at appointments.

Some medicines may interact or need to be used with caution when taking with anagrelide. These include:

- Omeprazole
- Theophylline
- Atazanavir
- Cilostazol
- Cimetidine
- Clozapine
- Cyclobenzaprine
- Ciprofloxacin
- Gatifloxacin
- Levofloxacin
- Norfloxacin
- Ofloxacin
- Fluvoxamine
- Imipramine
- Inamrinone
- Mexiletine
- Milrinone
- Naproxen
- Riluzole
- Sucralfate
- Tacrine
- Ticlopidine

Need to check the UK names for these –taken from USA National library of medicine info [I will see if I can find UK brand names, generic names or spelling]

What if I have other medical conditions?

Anagrelide should be used under supervision if you have now or have had any of the following conditions:

- Heart problems
- Kidney problems
- Liver problems
- Intolerance to some sugars

If you think you may have one of these conditions please discuss this with your doctor.

Frequently asked questions

Can I eat and drink normally?

Yes. We recommend that you eat a normal, healthy diet and drink plenty of water.

Can I drink alcohol?

While it is safe to drink alcohol in moderation whilst taking anagrelide, we recommend you do not exceed the recommended weekly limits of 21 units of alcohol per week for a man and 14 units for a woman. Alcohol can cause dehydration, and it is important to avoid becoming dehydrated if you have an MPD. Please ask your nurse or doctor if you require more information regarding alcohol consumption.

What if I want to have a child?

- We strongly recommend that you use contraception whilst taking anagrelide, because this medication can be harmful to a developing fetus.
- When planning to conceive or to father a child, you should stop taking anagrelide for a period of at least three months to allow the drug to clear from your system before trying to conceive.
- It is imperative to discuss your plans together with your haematologist prior to becoming pregnant or fathering a child. Your doctor can recommend treatment options for you that will not cause harm to your developing fetus and will increase your chance of a successful pregnancy.

Can I breastfeed while taking anagrelide?

We strongly recommend against breastfeeding your child whilst taking anagrelide. Anagrelide is a very strong drug that inhibits blood cell development. It can be secreted in breast milk and this may affect your baby's development.

Who will prescribe anagrelide for me?

Your doctor, specially-trained nurse, hospital pharmacist or sometimes your GP will prescribe your medication.

Can I drive?

Anagrelide can cause dizziness and drowsiness; if you experience these side effects

your ability to drive may be effected. If you are feeling drowsy or fatigued for any reason do not drive.

Do I need to take any special precautions?

Your skin may be more sensitive to sun whilst you are taking anagrelide. You may need to protect your skin by avoiding exposure to the sun, using sunscreen and wearing protective clothing and a hat.

Can I have vaccinations such as the flu jab while taking anagrelide?

You can have most vaccinations including the flu vaccine whilst taking anagrelide. However, some vaccinations are live vaccines and should not be taken with anagrelide. It is important you tell the person giving you the vaccine that you are taking anagrelide so they can check that it will be safe for you.

What to do if...

You have taken too much medicine/someone else has taken your medicine

If you have taken extra tablets or if another person has taken your medication please contact your nurse or doctor as soon as possible.

You were sick shortly after taking your tablets

If you are sick just once, take your next dose as usual. If you are sick over a number of days please contact your doctor.

You forget to take a dose

If you have forgotten to take a dose, do not take any extra but take your next dose as normal. If you have forgotten to take a few doses, start taking them again and contact your doctor.

If you need to have a medical procedure or operation

You may occasionally be required to adjust or stop taking anagrelide if you need an operation. It is important that the doctor or dentist planning the procedure or operation be informed that you are taking anagrelide and that he or she plans your procedure together

with your haematology doctor or nurse. We always recommend that you inform your haematology doctor or nurse when planning any procedures or operations.

If you feel anxious about taking anagrelide

If you have concerns, please discuss this with your doctor or nurse. You can also visit the “Support” section of our website at www.mpd-support.co.uk

What if I do not want to take this medication?

Whether or not to take anagrelide is your decision. If after discussing everything with your haematologist you still feel uncertain or prefer not to take this medication, you can choose not to take it.

Keep your doctor or nurse in the loop

If you decide not to take anagrelide or if you elect to stop after you begin treatment, it is important to inform your doctor or nurse of your decision. He or she can recommend alternatives or other suggestions if necessary to safeguard your health.

Is there an alternative?

There are other treatment alternatives available and you can discuss additional options with your haematologist. If you wish to read up about medication options please visit our website at www.mpd-support.co.uk and click on “Treatments.”

Consent

Your doctor will probably ask you to sign a consent form if you decide to begin treatment. This confirms that you know why anagrelide has been recommended for you and that you understand the risks and benefits of this treatment.

What can I do to help myself?

If you have an MPD it is important to take good care of yourself. There are many things you can do to feel better.

- Good nutrition is important. Eat a balanced diet including lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, lean protein and whole grains. Drink plenty of water and be careful to prevent dehydration by avoiding excessive alcohol and caffeinated drinks.

- Maintain a normal weight and maintain your muscle mass. Keep your cholesterol and blood sugar within normal limits.
- Exercise is very beneficial for people with MPDs and helps to fight fatigue. Be sure to check with your GP and haematologist before launching on any new programme and start slowly and gently if you have not exercised before.
- Stop smoking. Ask your GP if you need help.

Making the adjustment

It can be disconcerting to start a new medication or find you must increase your dosage. You may feel that your MPD is getting worse or that you are at greater risk of serious medical problems. You may also feel concerned about the long- and short-term risks of taking this medication.

It is normal to feel this way and many people with MPDs have had similar experiences. You may want to discuss your concerns with a family member or friend. The MPD Support Charity offers a “buddy” programme for interested patients. Please contact us at info@mpd-support.co.uk for more information.

It’s worth bearing in mind that many people with MPDs have a long life expectancy, and that the treatments are very effective at controlling cell production. You can read more about the psychological aspects of MPD treatment on our website at www.mpd-support.co.uk under “Support”.

Resources for patients and families

MPD Support

A patient- and doctor-led support group based in London which provides support and information for individuals with MPDs, their relatives and friends. The group provides a buddy scheme, regular newsletters and meets two to three times a year.
www.mpd-support.co.uk

Leukaemia CARE

An organisation which runs a helpline and website with information on MPDs as part of its more general support of those with blood disorders.
Tel 0800 1696680 or www.leukaemiacare.org.uk

Medicines.org

A website run in collaboration with the NHS providing up to date, reliable and understandable information about medicines – a handy resource for all medicines.
www.medicines.org.uk

Cancerbackup (now merged with Macmillan)

A charity which offers a website with information on MPDs, chemotherapy drugs, side effects and how best to manage side effects.
0808 800 1234 (Mon–Fri 9am–8pm) or www.cancerbackup.org.uk

About this publication and MPD Support

This document was written by Yvonne Francis, an NHS MPD specialist nurse, with input from consultant haematologists, specialist nurses, psychologists and people with MPDs.

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You can also contact the Guy's and St Thomas' Charity at info@gsttcharity.org.uk or visit their website for more information at www.gsttcharity.org.uk

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