



AMIODARONE

■ WHAT IS AMIODARONE?

Although amiodarone was originally designed to treat life-threatening ventricular arrhythmias, it is now more commonly used to treat atrial fibrillation. It is the most effective drug for this condition, but it also carries risk of significant side effects. It is a long-acting drug that stays in the body for many weeks. For this reason, it is a very convenient drug that only needs to be taken once a day, and doses can actually be missed without significant loss of efficacy.

■ HOW IS AMIODARONE TAKEN?

Amiodarone should be taken as directed by your doctor. If you do not understand these directions, ask your pharmacist, nurse or doctor to explain them to you. In general:

- Amiodarone should be taken with a full glass of water. It can be taken with or without food.
- Store amiodarone in a tightly sealed container away from heat, moisture and direct light.
- During the first 2-4 weeks, amiodarone is “loaded” at a higher dose, and your doctor may ask you to take it 3-4 times daily. After the loading phase, it only needs to be taken once daily.

■ WHAT SHOULD I AVOID WHILE TAKING AMIODARONE?

- Avoid prolonged exposure to sunlight. Use a good sunscreen or long sleeves. Amiodarone can cause a red rash which resembles a bad sunburn, and this rash can be triggered with prolonged sun exposure.
- After several years of exposure, amiodarone can cause a bluish discoloration of the skin.
- Many drugs interact with amiodarone. Consult with your doctor when starting new medications such as warfarin (Coumadin).
- Drink alcohol only in strict moderation if at all.

■ WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF AMIODARONE?

If you experience any of the following serious side effects, STOP taking amiodarone and seek emergency medical attention:

- An allergic reaction (difficulty breathing, closing of your throat; swelling of your lips, tongue or face; or hives)
- A new or worsening irregular heartbeat pattern
- Wheezing, coughing, chest pain or chest discomfort
- Fainting

Other less serious side effects may also occur. Continue to take your medication and talk to your doctor if you experience:

- Generalized muscle weakness
- Dizziness or tiredness
- Upset stomach, vomiting, decreased appetite or diarrhea
- Changes in taste
- Changes in vision
- Poor coordination
- Bluish-gray discoloration of the skin

■ **WHAT OTHER DRUGS INTERACT WITH AMIODARONE?**

Consult your doctor for specific advice if you are taking anticoagulants, theophylline, phenytoin, digoxin or other heart medications. The blood-thinning effect of warfarin (Coumadin) may be drastically enhanced within days of starting amiodarone.

■ **WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT TAKING AMIODARONE?**

- To screen for early signs of side effects, most patients should have regular blood tests for liver, thyroid and pulmonary (lung) function.
- You should also have annual eye exams.
- Before dental work, emergency treatment or surgery requiring general anesthesia, be sure to tell the attending doctor or dentist that you are taking amiodarone.