

Intravenous Immunoglobulin

What is Intravenous Immunoglobulin (IVIg)?

IVIg is a blood product, manufactured from the blood plasma (the liquid part of the blood that does not contain blood cells) of healthy blood donors.

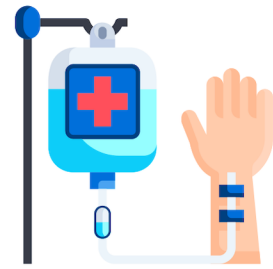
It is used to treat some autoimmune diseases, including neurological disorders like myasthenia gravis or nerve disorders and immunodeficiency.

It contains immunoglobulins that can replace antibodies (natural body proteins that fight infection). In immunodeficiencies, IVIg boosts the immune system, while in autoimmune diseases, IVIg 'readjusts' some parts of the 'over-active' immune system.



How is it taken?

- It is given as an infusion into the vein (through a needle attached to a tube connected to the bottle of IVIG). This may take several hours.
- The number and frequency of IVIG infusions depends on your condition.



When does it work?

- The effectiveness of IVIG can vary based on the specific condition being treated, individual response and the treatment protocol followed.
- While some patients feel better rapidly after administration of IVIG, it may not work immediately for some. It can take two to four weeks after the infusion before you notice any benefit.

What are the possible side effect?

IVIG is generally considered safe, but like any medical treatment, there may be some side effects. These side effects are usually related to the dose and how fast the IVIG is given.

Mild reactions:

- Most reactions are mild and tend occur during the infusion, and occasionally last a few days. These occur in up to 10% of patients and include mild fever, chills, headaches. muscle aches, nausea and fatigue. Some of these can be managed by slowing the rate of infusion, or by administering other medications.

Allergic reactions:

- Some individuals may experience an allergic reaction including skin rashes, itching, hives or more severe reactions. Allergic reactions are relatively rare but can occur. If that happens, IVIG will be stopped. Medications to treat allergic reactions will be given immediately.

Fluctuations in blood pressure:

- IVIG infusions sometimes cause temporary changes in blood pressure, which may result in symptoms like dizziness.

Fluid overload:

- IVIG infusions involve introducing a significant amount of fluid into the bloodstream. In rare cases, this can lead to fluid overload, causing swelling, difficulty in breathing and potentially heart-related symptoms. Your doctor may adjust some of your medications if you are at risk.

Kidney function changes:

- In some cases, IVIG therapy may affect kidney function temporarily, especially in individuals with existing kidney issues. Your doctor will closely monitor your kidney function during and after the IVIG infusion.

Blood clotting:

- There is a slight risk of blood clot formation due to the increased viscosity of the blood after IVIG infusion. This risk is usually minimal but might be of concern for individuals with pre-existing clotting disorders. Your doctor will discuss with you the use of IVIG if you are at risk.

Blood-borne infections:

- There is a very small risk that blood-borne infections may be passed on during the infusion. You may be reassured that blood products from donors are carefully screened in Singapore and treated to prevent transmission of the hepatitis virus and other viruses before they are given to another person. There have been no documented cases of the transmission of the virus that causes AIDS (HIV) through IVIG.

Meningitis:

- There is a small risk of meningitis (inflammation of the brain lining) and you should inform your doctor if you have a severe headache or weakness.

Inform your doctor if you experience the following during or after the IVIG infusion:

- Fever
- Rash
- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Tiredness
- Swelling or pain and redness of the legs
- Breathlessness
- Dark urine, yellow eyes
- Reduced urination or sudden weight gain



Do I have to undergo any tests while on IVIG?

- Before starting IVIG, your doctor will likely recommend certain tests to ensure that the treatment is safe and appropriate for you. Common tests that might be performed before starting IVIG include full blood count, liver and kidney function tests, immunoglobulin levels and tests for infectious diseases. These help to evaluate your overall health and any potential problems that may preclude you from receiving IVIG treatment.
- Your doctor will do regular blood tests to monitor disease activity to decide on the need for further doses of IVIG.

Does it affect pregnancy or breastfeeding?

- IVIG is generally considered safe during pregnancy - for both mother and the developing foetus when used under appropriate medical supervision. Your doctor will monitor your health and the well-being of the foetus to ensure everything is progressing as expected.
- IVIG can be excreted into the milk and be transferred to the child by breastfeeding.

Will I be able to have immunizations?

- IVIG treatment may interfere with vaccinations. It is best to wait at least six weeks after receiving IVIG treatment before having an vaccinations.
- Always consult your doctor before making any decisions about vaccinations while on IVIG.

Are there any alternatives?

Your doctor will advise you on the safest and most effective option. If you have any concerns, do raise them with your doctor.

Contributed by Rheumatology Service

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