



Maidstone and  
Tunbridge Wells  
NHS Trust

# Tacrolimus

**Information for patients**

**Ophthalmology Services**

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## What is tacrolimus?

Tacrolimus (trade name: Prograf) is a drug used to suppress the immune system. The immune system is usually responsible for fighting infections, but sometimes it is necessary to suppress its action. In conditions such as uveitis/scleritis, the immune system mistakenly reacts against a part of the body causing inflammation. Tacrolimus works by preventing immune cells from dividing and reproducing quickly, and so reduces the ability of these cells to cause inflammation. It is used in kidney transplant patients to reduce the risk of rejection of the transplanted organ, in uveitis and other autoimmune disorders. It is taken orally as a capsule.

## Why have I been started on this treatment?

Most patients who use tacrolimus to treat uveitis/scleritis are already using a steroid called prednisolone. In the long term, in large doses, steroids have multiple side effects. Tacrolimus is usually given to improve control of the uveitis/scleritis so that the dose of prednisolone can be reduced. Tacrolimus is usually given for a trial period of a few months to establish whether it is useful for a particular patient. It is much more useful for some patients than for others and some patients tolerate it better than others.

## What are the side effects of this drug?

### 1. The kidney

Tacrolimus may reduce kidney function. This is a common problem when used in high doses, but when used in low doses (as in the treatment of uveitis/scleritis) this is much less likely. While you are taking tacrolimus, you will need to come to the uveitis clinic every six weeks for blood tests to monitor your kidneys.

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## 2. Drug absorption

The amount of drug that is absorbed from the capsule varies from patient to patient and needs to be monitored. Every time you come to the uveitis clinic you should **omit your morning dose** on that day. We will take a blood test to measure the level of drug remaining from the previous evening's dose, and then you take your morning dose afterwards.

## 3. Blood pressure

Sometimes tacrolimus causes the blood pressure to rise. Your blood pressure will be checked regularly.

## 4. Infection and vaccination

Tacrolimus, especially when used together with prednisolone, increases the risk of infection. There is a small possibility that viral warts could develop while using tacrolimus.

It is **extremely important** that you tell any doctor planning to give you a vaccine, that you are taking tacrolimus; some vaccines cannot be used. However, it is recommended that you obtain the annual influenza vaccination from your GP, and also obtain testing for immunity to pneumococcus, followed by immunisation if necessary.

## 5. Taking other tablets

Some tablets interact with tacrolimus to cause undesirable effects. These include some antibiotics. It is **extremely important** that you tell any doctor who wishes to prescribe a drug for you, that you are taking tacrolimus. Some medicines obtained over the counter without a prescription can be dangerous. Drugs containing aspirin or ibuprofen should be avoided. Paracetamol is not a problem. If in doubt, ask your doctor first.

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## 6. Others

If you are a woman, it is important that you do not become pregnant when using tacrolimus as there is a risk of damage to the baby. Tacrolimus can interfere with the oral contraceptive (“the pill”) so **other forms of contraception should be used. Get advice from your GP.**

### The following can also occur with tacrolimus:

- Headache
- Anxiety
- Indigestion
- Light-headedness
- Ankle swelling
- Breathlessness
- Heart problems (rarely)
- Tremors
- Insomnia
- Constipation
- Tiredness
- Diabetes
- Hair loss
- Abnormal sensations
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Loss of libido
- Muscle cramps
- Itching


Used as instructed by your doctor, and with proper safety monitoring, Tacrolimus does not usually cause problems. However, it is a potent drug. **There is no drug useful for the treatment of uveitis/scleritis which is entirely free of potential or actual side-effects. Make sure that any doctor who treats you for any reason, knows that you are taking Tacrolimus.**

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## Further information and advice can be obtained from:

**NHS 111**  
**NHS Choices online**  
**Your GP**


 **111**  
[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## Clinic contacts

Maidstone Orthoptic Clinic  01622 226236

Tunbridge Wells Orthoptic Clinic  
(Planned Care)  01622 228218

Orthoptic clinical enquiries only  
[mtwtrPemburyOrthoptics@nhs.net](mailto:mtwtrPemburyOrthoptics@nhs.net)

Medway Orthoptic Clinic  01634 830000  
Extn 5792

**For out of hours ring:** 01622 729000, ask for the on-call eye doctor or go to your nearest Emergency Department

**NHS 111** - Telephone 111

**Visit NHS Choices Online** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

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**MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.**

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

**Telephone:** ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

**Email:** [mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net](mailto:mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net)

**or visit their office** at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: [www.mtw.nhs.uk](http://www.mtw.nhs.uk) or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

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