

Patient information factsheet

Pirfenidone (Esbriet®)

We have given you this factsheet because you have been prescribed a medicine called Pirfenidone (also known by its brand name, Esbriet®). It explains what Pirfenidone is, why you have been prescribed it, how to take it and the potential side effects of taking the medicine. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our team.

What is Pirfenidone?

Pirfenidone, also known by its brand name, Esbriet®, is an anti-fibrotic medicine. Anti-fibrotic medicines are designed to slow down the development of scarring (fibrosis) in the lungs.

Why have I been prescribed Pirfenidone?

You have been prescribed Pirfenidone because you have a condition called idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF). IPF is a serious lung condition in which the lungs become scarred and breathing becomes increasingly difficult. 'Idiopathic' means that the cause is unknown.

As scar tissue (known as 'fibrosis') increases in the lungs, the lungs become smaller and stiffer. This leads to coughing and increasing breathlessness. IPF is a progressive disease, which means that it will get worse over time, but the rate at which it progresses varies from person to person. If it is not treated, it may be life-limiting.

Pirfenidone won't cure your lung condition or reverse any existing scarring, but it can effectively slow down the rate of your lung function decline.

How should I take Pirfenidone?

Week one

You will start taking Pirfenidone as one 267mg tablet, three times a day for one week.

Week two

You will then increase to two tablets, three times a day for the second week.

Week three and onwards

You will then increase to the full dose of three tablets, three times a day from week three onwards.

Pirfenidone should always be taken with meals. When taking more than one tablet at a meal, you should take them separately from each other (swallow one at a time).

The tablets should be swallowed whole with a glass of water. Do not crush or chew them.

What should I do if I miss a dose of Pirfenidone?

If you miss a dose of Pirfenidone, take it with food as soon as you remember.

Do not take two doses at the same time to make up for a missed dose.

Each dose should be separated by at least three hours.

Do not take more than your prescribed daily dose in any 24-hour period.

Are there any potential side effects?

As with all medicines, Pirfenidone can cause some side effects. Most side effects of Pirfenidone are mild to moderate and can be managed with advice from our team.

The most common side effects of Pirfenidone are digestive system problems like heartburn, abdominal pain, nausea (feeling sick) and diarrhoea. Please let us know if you experience any of these side effects. We can offer advice about how to stay well-hydrated and when to take anti-diarrhoea tablets, such as loperamide (Immodium®).

More serious side effects include:

Sun sensitivity

Pirfenidone can make your skin more sensitive to the sun, so it is important that you:

- wear a minimum of SPF 50 sunscreen that blocks out UVA and UVB rays
- wear suitable clothing (such as long sleeves and a sun hat)
- try to avoid direct sunlight (particularly during the hottest part of the day)

Changes in your liver function

We will check your liver function with regular blood tests.

For the full list of potential side effects that may occur with Pirfenidone, please read the leaflet supplied with your medicine.

If you develop any side effects, please contact us for advice.

Will I need to be monitored while taking Pirfenidone?

You will need to have regular blood tests while taking Pirfenidone, to check for any unwanted effects on your liver function. You will need to contact your GP surgery to arrange these blood tests.

You will need blood tests every month for the first six months. After this, you will need blood tests every three months while you take Pirfenidone (if your blood results remain stable). To help you remember when your next blood test is due, we recommend making a note on your calendar.

It is very important that you have these blood tests. If you do not have your liver function monitored, we will not be able to prescribe you Pirfenidone.

Can I take other medicines with Pirfenidone?

Some medicines can stop Pirfenidone working properly (for example, omeprazole and rifampicin) and others can increase the side effects of Pirfenidone (for example, ciprofloxacin, doxycycline, amiodarone, and any other medicines that are known as CYP1A2 inhibitors). For this reason, we will check what other medicines you are taking before prescribing you Pirfenidone.

Patient information factsheet

Please contact us before starting any new medicines (including over-the-counter medicines) to check that they are safe to take with Pirfenidone.

It is important that you let your GP know that you are taking Pirfenidone when they are reviewing your current medications or if they prescribe you anything new.

You should avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice while you are on Pirfenidone.

How long will I need to take Pirfenidone for?

Pirfenidone is only effective for as long as it is taken, so we may recommend that you continue taking it for a long time if it is tolerated and effective.

When can I stop taking Pirfenidone?

We will give you breathing tests (also known as pulmonary function tests or PFTs) to see how you are responding to Pirfenidone. If it isn't helping to slow the decline in your pulmonary function, your respiratory consultant will talk to you about stopping it.

If you want to stop taking Pirfenidone for any other reason (for example, if you're experiencing several side effects), please contact us for advice.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

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