

Rosiglitazone (Avandia)

Questions and Answers for Patients September 2010

1. What is rosiglitazone?

Rosiglitazone is a treatment for type 2 (adult onset) diabetes. It is taken orally and helps to control blood sugar by increasing the body's response to the body's own insulin. Rosiglitazone is known by the brand name Avandia, and is also available in the combination treatment Avandamet (rosiglitazone and metformin combined).

2. How many people in the UK take Avandia?

Based on the usage data for the UK between 1 April 2009 and 30 March 2010 it has been estimated that approximately 90,000 patients are taking rosiglitazone. This includes patients receiving Avandia (approximately 55,300) and Avandamet (approximately 34,500).

3. What are the benefits and risks of rosiglitazone (Avandia)?

Potential Benefits

In type 2 diabetes, the body does not make enough insulin, or cannot use insulin properly; this is called insulin resistance. Type 2 diabetes is usually managed through lifestyle interventions (diet and exercise) in the early stages but as the condition is progressive eventually most individuals will need to take oral anti-diabetic medicines.

Used appropriately, rosiglitazone helps to control blood sugar in patients with diabetes. In the UK it is not the main treatment for type 2 diabetes but is generally reserved for patients who have not responded adequately to or cannot take a combination of standard treatments (metformin and sulphonylurea). In helping to control blood sugar rosiglitazone may help to slow the progression of some complications of diabetes, e.g. kidney problems.

Risks

All medicines have some risk of side effects. The known side effects of rosiglitazone are described in the patient information leaflet accompanying the medicine – [see also heart/blood vessel problems below](#).

4. What are the heart/blood vessel problems that have been linked to Avandia?

Over recent years emerging data have suggested that rosiglitazone may be associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disorders including heart attacks, heart failure and stroke. People with diabetes are already at an increased risk of these conditions and diabetic treatment should ultimately aim to reduce these risks. Because of the inherent risks of diabetes it has been difficult clearly to establish whether the increased risk is due to rosiglitazone treatment or to the patients' underlying diabetes. Emerging evidence points strongly to some increased risk of cardiovascular problems in rosiglitazone treated patients, in contrast to pioglitazone (another similar drug).

5. Am I at risk of serious side effects of Avandia?

Existing prescribing guidance serves to minimise any risks and exclude those at highest risk. Your doctor will have carefully considered this guidance when choosing to prescribe rosiglitazone for you.

6. Are there any problems that I should look out for while taking Avandia – what should I do?

The patient information leaflet accompanying the medicine gives advice on side effects and what to look out for. If you think that you are suffering from any side effects from Avandia you should arrange to see your diabetes health professional (doctor or nurse), at the next convenient appointment.

7. What are the symptoms of heart problems that I should look out for?

Symptoms of heart problems include: Shortness of breath, getting tired after light physical activity, significant increase in weight, swelling of ankles (and elsewhere), and chest pains or tightness.

8. Are there any other problems to look out for?

Yes. Report the following to your doctor or diabetic nurse: abdominal (stomach) pains, dark coloured urine, nausea/vomiting and loss of appetite, new eye problems/visual problems, yellow colouration of the eyes or skin.

In addition, serious allergic reactions occur very rarely, but may require immediate treatment. Symptoms include: raised and itchy rash, swelling of the mouth or tongue, difficulty in breathing, dizziness or collapse. Seek immediate attention if you think you are suffering from this type of allergic reaction.

9. Are there any alternative treatments, for me and my health professional to consider?

Yes. Your doctor/nurse will be able to discuss this with you. Adult onset (type 2) Diabetes can be treated with a variety of oral medicines, although not all treatments are suitable for all patients. Amongst other treatments, your doctor or nurse may consider pioglitazone/Actos (another medicine that acts in the same way as rosiglitazone but for which there is less concern about some side effects – especially heart problems).

If your doctor is concerned about your treatment with Avandia then he/she should consider alternative treatments and recommend a change.

10. Should I stop taking Avandia/rosiglitazone?

It is very important that your diabetic treatment is monitored by your doctors/nurses. You should not stop treatment with Avandia/Avandamet unless you have been advised to do so by your healthcare professional.