

DR. JEFF C.H. DONOVAN
DERMATOLOGIST, SPECIALIZING IN HAIR LOSS

4370 Lorimer Road
Suite 334B
Whistler, BC, Canada
V8E 1A6

Tel: 604.283.1887
Fax: 604.648.9003
Email: office@donovanmedical.com
Web: www.donovanmedical.com

Acitretin for Women with Scarring Alopecia

What is Acitretin?

- Acitretin is a type of vitamin A pill. It is used for certain types of hair loss conditions as well as in other dermatologic issues like psoriasis. It is very closely related to another vitamin A tablet called isotretinoin.

How is Acitretin prescribed?

- Dr. Donovan will describe how he would like you to use Acitretin.
- It is normally taken as 10-50 mg ONCE PER DAY but most patients with scarring alopecia will start 10 mg daily or three times weekly. Patients may lower their dose after that or increase their dose – it depends on how they are responding to treatment. Dr. Donovan will always start at lower doses for at least 1 month before changing the dose. It is very important that you do not increase the dose unless advised to by Dr. Donovan. It is best if you take acitretin with fatty food. Generally speaking, Dr Donovan will only prescribe acitretin to post-menopausal women with scarring alopecia.

Who should not use Acitretin?

- Do not take Acitretin if you are allergic to Acitretin
- Tell your physician if you have ever had colitis (inflammation in the bowel)
- Dr. Donovan does not usually prescribe acitretin to women who still have regular menstrual cycles
- Patients with low white blood cells counts may not be able to use Acitretin
- Patients with untreated hypothyroidism can't use Acitretin
- Patients with high cholesterol or triglycerides can't use Acitretin (until the levels normalize)
- Patients with poorly diabetes can't use Acitretin as it may worsen blood sugars
- Patients with bone problems may not be a good candidate for Acitretin
- Patient with liver or kidney disease might not be able to use Acitretin
- Patients taking doxycycline or tetracycline can't take Acitretin
- Patients taking methotrexate, phenytoin, diabetes drugs, progestin only pills often can't take Acitretin
- Patients taking Prednisone need to watch that the fats in the blood don't rise too quickly if taking acitretin.

Acitretin for Women with Scarring Alopecia

What side effects are possible with Acitretin?

- Teratogenicity – Acitretin is harmful to a developing fetus and ***must not*** be taken during pregnancy. Dr Donovan does not typically prescribe acitretin to premenopausal women for scarring alopecia.
- Dry mouth, dry eyes, dry nose in most people (can lead to nose bleeds). Dry lips is usually a sign that some appropriate level of the drug has been reached.
- Sticky skin sometimes
- Itchy skin
- Reduced night vision and altered night vision (halos around lights)
- Increased cholesterol (in 10-30%) and triglycerides (in 20-40%)
 - The risk of this happening is higher if patient is diabetic, obese or drink alcohols
- Irritation of the pancreas if fats rise to high levels
 - this gives abdominal pain and a potentially serious condition called “pancreatitis”
- Irritation of the liver (in 15 % of people)
- Muscle pain
- Reduced white blood cell counts (called leukopenia)
- Headaches
 - and rare type of headache called pseudotumor cerebri
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Depression
- Hair shedding is rare but can occur
- Nail changes
- Increased sensitivity to the sun
- There is no reason at present to believe that acitretin (or closely related isotretinoin) increase the risk of developing inflammatory bowel disease.
- A variety of bone issues may rarely occur, but the risk of osteoporosis does not appear to be increased in low dose users of acitretin

What side effects should prompt me to STOP Acitretin?

- Stop taking Acitretin if you experience reactions such as rash, fever, itching, joint pain, swollen lymph nodes, and or sores on the genitals.
- Stop taking Acitretin if an allergic reaction develops (shortness of breath; closing of your throat; hives; swelling of your lips, face, or tongue; rash; or fainting);
- Stop taking Acitretin if you get dark urine or whitish stools
- Stop taking Acitretin if you develop severe watery diarrhea and abdominal cramps
- Stop taking Acitretin if you develop unusual bleeding or bruising.

Acitretin for Women with Scarring Alopecia

Are any blood tests needed before I start Acitretin?

- CBC, Liver tests (AST, ALT, amylase, bilirubin), Creatinine (kidney tests)
- Fasting lipids (fats, cholesterol)
- Blood sugars (glucose and hemoglobin A1c)
- These blood tests are repeated monthly for THREE months and then every 3-6 months

Are any blood tests needed after I start Acitretin?

Yes, you will need FASTING blood tests every month for 3 months and then every 3 months

- CBC, Liver tests (AST, ALT, amylase, bilirubin) Creatinine (kidney tests)
- Fasting lipids (fats, cholesterol)
 - Patients with diabetes, obesity and alcoholism are an increased risk of hypercholesterolemia and liver toxicity
- Patients on long term Acitretin may get x-rays of the spine, wrists, and ankles but this is no longer recommended routinely as it was in the past. Targeted x ray examinations are appropriate if specific pain occurs.
- An ophthalmologic (eye) exam may be appropriate in long term users of acitretin