



## Jeff Donovan MD PhD FRCPC

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### INFORMATION ON ISOTRETINOIN

#### What is Isotretinoin?

- Isotretinoin is a type of vitamin A pill.
- It is sometimes used for acne, but can also be used for certain types of hair loss conditions

#### How is Isotretinoin prescribed?

- Dr. Donovan will advise your how much and how often you should take this medication
- Women of child bearing age must use two forms of contraception before Isotretinoin is prescribed. One of these forms of contraception is usually a birth control pill. This must be used for a full month before starting isotretinoin. The isotretinoin is started on day 2 after your period. However, before starting isotretinoin, you are required to have two negative pregnancy tests. One of these will be two weeks before starting treatment and the other will be one month before starting treatment. Your doctor will advise you how he would like you to schedule these tests. If you suspect at any time that you might be pregnant, you must see your doctor. You must not become pregnant on isotretinoin as the baby will be deformed.

#### Who should not use Isotretinoin?

- Do not take Isotretinoin if you are allergic to Isotretinoin
- Tell Dr. Donovan if you have ever had colitis (inflammation in the bowel)
- Isotretinoin can not be used during pregnancy or breast feeding
- Patients with allergy to peanut oils can not use some forms of isotretinoin
- Patients with low white blood cells counts can't use isotretinoin
- Patients with hypothyroidism can't use isotretinoin

## Who should not use Isotretinoin (continued)?

- Patients with high cholesterol can't use isotretinoin
- Patient with liver or kidney disease can't use isotretinoin
- Patients taking doxycycline or tetracycline can't take isotretinoin
- Patients with diabetes can't use acitretin
- Patients taking Prednisone need to watch that the fats in the blood don't rise too quickly if taking isotretinoin

## What side effects are possible with Isotretinoin?

- Teratogenicity – isotretinoin is harmful to a developing fetus and **must not** be taken during pregnancy.
- Dry mouth, dry eyes, dry nose in most people
- Sticky skin sometimes
- Altered night vision (halos around lights)
- Bone thinning if used for many years
- Increased cholesterol (10-30 % of people) and triglycerides (20-40 %) \*\*
- Irritation of the pancreas if fats rise to high levels ( this gives abdominal pain and a serious condition called pancreatitis)
- Irritation of the liver (in 15 % of people)
- Muscle pain
- Headaches
- Depression
- Hair shedding is rare but can occur
- Nail changes
- Colitis (inflammation of the bowel). The risk of developing colitis may be increased with isotretinoin but this is controversial.
- Increased sensitivity to the sun

## What side effects should prompt me to STOP Isotretinoin?

- Stop taking Isotretinoin if you experience reactions such as rash, fever, itching, joint pain, swollen lymph nodes, and or sores on the genitals.
- Stop taking Isotretinoin 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 Isotretinoin if you get dark urine or whitish stools
- Stop taking Isotretinoin if you develop severe watery diarrhea and abdominal cramps
- Stop taking Isotretinoin if you develop unusual bleeding or bruising.

### **Are any blood tests needed before I start Isotretinoin?**

The following FASTING blood tests are sometimes ordered by Dr. Donovan. Be sure to check with him:

- CBC, Liver tests (AST, ALT, amylase, bilirubin) Creatinine (kidney tests)
- Fasting lipids (fats, cholesterol)
- Pregnancy tests in women (two negative ones are needed)
- These blood tests are repeated monthly for THREE months and then every 3-6 months
- Patients on long term isotretinoin may get x-rays of the spine, wrists, and ankles and an ophthalmologic (eye) exam

### **Are any blood tests needed after I start Isotretinoin?**

- CBC, Liver tests (AST, ALT, amylase, bilirubin) Creatinine (kidney tests)
- Fasting lipids (fats, cholesterol)
- Pregnancy tests in women
- Patients on long term isotretinoin may get x-rays of the spine, wrists, and ankles and an ophthalmologic (eye) exam

