



This handout explains the drug etanercept. It includes how to take it, what to expect, possible side effects, and cautions.

# Etanercept

*Enbrel*

## What is etanercept?

*Etanercept* (brand name Enbrel) prevents the inflammation that occurs in *psoriasis* and other similar autoimmune diseases. It does this by blocking a protein called *tumor necrosis factor* (TNF).

## How do I take it?

Etanercept must be injected under the skin (*subcutaneously*). You will receive the drug in 1 of these forms:

- **25 mg powder:** Dissolve the powder in the 1 ml water that is included with the drug. This solution will stay fresh for up to 2 weeks in the refrigerator.
- **50 mg prefilled syringe:** Keep the syringe in the refrigerator. Do **not** freeze it.

### *How to Inject Etanercept*

- Remove the solution or syringe from the refrigerator 15 minutes before you inject it to allow it to warm to room temperature.
- Inject etanercept just under your skin, usually in your thigh, upper arm, or abdomen.
- Use different injection sites. Each injection should be at least 1 inch away from where you have injected etanercept within the last 2 months.

### *Dose*

Most people inject 50 mg etanercept 2 times a week for the first 12 weeks. When their condition starts to improve, 80% of people (80 out of 100) can reduce their dose to 50 mg, or even 25 mg, once a week.

## What should I expect?

You should see the best results after taking etanercept for about 20 weeks.

When you start taking etanercept, we may ask you to have a blood draw so that we can do some basic blood tests. We may check your blood again every 3 months while you are taking the drug.

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## **Is it safe?**

Etanercept was approved for use in the United States by the Food and Drug Administration in 1998. Since then, it has been used safely in thousands of patients. But, there are some side effects and warning signs that you will need to watch for.

### ***Injection Site Reactions***

A few people (about 14%, or 14 out of 100) develop an area of redness and swelling around the skin where the etanercept is injected. This occurs most often after the 2nd or 3rd injection. Old injection sites may start to swell at the same time.

This swelling usually goes away after about a month and does not happen again. If it bothers you, call your dermatologist. It can be treated with topical ointments or pills like Benadryl.

### ***Infection***

Inflammation is one way our bodies fight off infections. Because etanercept prevents inflammation, you are at higher risk for severe infection while on etanercept.

Call us at **206-598-5065** if you have:

- Fever higher than 100.4°F (38°C)
- Sore throat
- Severe headache
- Any other symptoms that you are concerned about

We may ask you to visit your doctor, or we may be able to take care of the problem over the phone. Most of the time, these symptoms are not serious. But, we will want to be sure.

### ***Lymphoma***

Early studies suggested that people who were taking etanercept had a slightly higher risk of *lymphoma* (cancer in the lymph system). This issue is still being studied, but it appears that people with psoriasis who are taking etanercept have about the same risk of lymphoma as people with psoriasis who are not taking it. More studies are being done to answer this question.

### ***Autoimmune Disease***

Rarely, people on etanercept develop an autoimmune disease called *lupus*. This usually goes away after etanercept is stopped.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Your questions are important. If you have any questions about your treatment, please call the number below to speak with a dermatology provider.

Dermatology Center:  
206-598-5065

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### ***Tuberculosis***

Etanercept can activate tuberculosis (TB) in people who have been exposed to the disease in the past. We will give you a TB skin test before you start taking etanercept. If you keep taking the drug, you will have a TB skin test once a year.

### ***Multiple Sclerosis***

People with multiple sclerosis (MS) have gotten worse after starting etanercept. You should not take etanercept if you or anyone in your family has or has had MS.

### ***Congestive Heart Failure***

People with congestive heart failure (CHF) should not take etanercept. The drug can make this condition worse.

## **Vaccines**

Because etanercept suppresses the immune system, you should not receive live vaccines while you are taking the drug. Killed or recombinant protein vaccines are safe.

Always ask your doctor before you get **any** vaccination. These are the live vaccines you **must** avoid while taking etanercept (as of 2011):

- Measles-mumps-rubella-varicella (MMR or MMRV)
  - Nasal influenza (FluMist)
- Please note that the flu shot is OK. Only inhaled FluMist is live and must be avoided.*
- Rotavirus (Rotarix, RotaTeq)
  - Chicken pox or zoster/shingles (VZV Varivax or Zostavax)
  - Smallpox (ACAM2000)
  - Yellow fever (YF-Vax)
  - Typhoid (Vivotif Berna)

*Please note that the Typhim Vi preparation of the typhoid vaccine is safe to use.*

If you need one of the live vaccines listed above, you will need to stop etanercept 10 days before you have the vaccine. You can resume etanercept therapy 10 days after you have the vaccine.

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