

# Reducing dose of biologic therapies in rheumatology

Information and advice for patients

## Pharmacy

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### Introduction

This leaflet will give you information about a new dose reduction programme to help you decide whether you'd like to take part. A member of staff will speak to you about everything in this leaflet, but if you have any questions, please ask us.

### Why am I being asked to take part in this programme?

Research studies and local clinical experience has shown that patients who are stable on biologic therapies can reduce their doses or, occasionally, even come off the drug altogether without worsening their symptoms or control.

Patients who have a good response to biologic therapies after having low disease activity or remission for one year are eligible to be considered for our Biologics Dose Tapering (BDT) programme.

### What is the BDT programme?

The programme involves increasing the time between doses. Because drugs come as single-use injections, the best way to reduce the dose is by stretching out the gap (extending the interval) between injections. This allows you to gradually increase the time between injections in a stepwise manner. It's important to note that you are always in control and doses are tailored for you. There is the option of further increasing the interval when you are reviewed by your specialist team.

### Why are we offering BDT?

As with any drug it is good practice not to use more than is needed to achieve the desired effect. You might need the full dose but there is now good evidence that you can reduce the dose without any change in your symptoms. This will help reduce the risk of side effects in the future.

## **Will I be given information or instructions about reducing the length of time between doses?**

Yes. You will be given a set of instructions by a specialist pharmacist detailing when to inject as part of BDT. This will be documented in your clinic letter and on the label on the injection box.

## **Is there a chance I will go back to how I was before?**

You might worry that reducing your medication could make your condition worse. If we lower the dose slowly, using a plan like BDT, flare-ups are uncommon. If you ever feel things are getting worse, you can go back to the dose that worked best for you at any time.

It is important to remember that no drug is perfect, and some patients relapse even on the full dose of medication.

## **Have other people tried this?**

There are now many research studies that have shown that the dose of biologic therapies can be reduced safely in many patients. European Guidelines now tell us that dose reduction should be considered in stable patients. Rheumatology departments in the UK are introducing this option for their patients, so we are in line with the general thinking on this subject.

## **What are the advantages of reducing dose?**

The main advantage of reducing the dose is that it lowers the risk of side effects. Other benefits include being more in control of your disease, not having to be at home for so many deliveries and being easier to go on holiday without having to take injections.

## **Is this a research project?**

There is already research evidence indicating that biologics reduction is effective and a reasonable approach. This is therefore not a research project, but we will monitor your progress on the programme.

## **What happens if I don't want to try BDT?**

This is your decision. No one will put any pressure on you and your treatment won't be affected in any way. We would certainly want to explore the reasons and concerns behind your decision (to make sure you have all the information you need to make your choice) but the decision is up to you.

## **What have other patients who have already tried BDT said?**

We asked other patients for feedback, and this is what some of our patients said:

"I have followed the advice given to me by my specialist and now I inject every month instead of every two weeks. This has allowed me to take control and reduce some of the side effects I experienced."

"I worried that I would go back to having pain and swelling if I reduced my dose, but I was fine with stretching it and followed the advice to go back to my original dose if my symptoms started to worsen."

## Who can I contact for more information?

Please contact your consultant through their secretary numbers which you'll find on the top of your hospital letters.

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact SWB Library Services on ext 3587 or email [swbh.library@nhs.net](mailto:swbh.library@nhs.net).



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M8490

Issue Date: April 2026

Review Date: April 2029