

BIOLOGIC MEDICATIONS FOR LUPUS

What Are Biologic Medications & Who Are They For?






Biologics have revolutionized the management of various rheumatic diseases, including lupus, by effectively controlling symptoms and slowing disease progression.

Biologics are advanced medications proven to target specific components of the immune system responsible for causing disease. Unlike conventional drugs, which are chemically synthesized and often non-specific (e.g., steroids or immunosuppressants), biologics are derived from living cells and include proteins or antibodies.

LUPUS-SPECIFIC BIOLOGIC DRUGS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE IN ONTARIO

Belimumab (Benlysta®)

Anifrolumab (Saphnelo®)

	Targets BLYS, a protein that helps the B cells to mature and produce antibodies that cause damage in lupus		Targets Type-1 Interferon that drives inflammation in lupus patients through various pathways
	Lupus Nephritis (LN) Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE)		Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE)
	Intravenous Infusion	Subcutaneous Injection	Intravenous Infusion
	Doses 1-3: Biweekly Doses 4+: Monthly	Weekly	Monthly – Approx. 30 minute duration
	Clinic Setting	Home/Outside Clinic (self-administered)	Clinic Setting

BENEFITS

- **Improved Symptoms**
Reduce joint pain, swelling, and stiffness
- **Slowed Disease Progression**
Help prevent long-term joint and tissue damage
- **Steroid-Sparing Effect**
Allow faster & more effective tapering of corticosteroids, thus reducing the risk of steroid-related damage
- **Enhanced Quality of Life**
By controlling disease activity, biologics can improve overall physical function and quality of life

POTENTIAL SIDE EFFECTS

COMMON:

- Nausea
- Fever & Headache
- Respiratory Infections
- Injection/Infusion Reactions
- Herpes Zoster Infection (shingles):
anifrolumab
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue

RARE:

- Hypersensitivity Reactions (allergic reactions)
- Infusion Reactions (fever, low blood pressure, and difficulty breathing)
- Serious Infections
- Reactivation of Latent Viral Infections (EBV, CMV)
- Depression & Suicidal Thoughts: belimumab

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HOW TO PREPARE FOR TREATMENT



Review your medical history, current health, medications & pregnancy plans.



Complete necessary blood tests and check for infections.



Ensure routine vaccines are up to date. Avoid live vaccines.



Stay alert for signs of infections, mental health changes, or allergic reactions.



Practice good hygiene and avoid close contact with sick individuals.



Attend regular check-ups to monitor your health while on biologic therapy.

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT AFTER STARTING TREATMENT?



You may notice little to no change during the first few weeks.



Monitor your health for any potential side effects.



Biologics often take 3–6 months to show their full effect.



Reach out to your physician with any questions or concerns.

In Ontario, biologic medications approved for lupus are not authorized for patients under 18 years of age. Patients with lupus who are considering pregnancy should consult their doctor to explore treatment options.

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