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PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Interferon Alfa-2b

This information from Lexicomp® explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

## Brand Names: US

Intron A

## Brand Names: Canada

Intron A; Intron A (Hsa-Free); Intron A Pen [DSC]

## Warning

- Alpha interferons may cause mental health problems or make them worse. Suicide or suicidal thoughts, thoughts of hurting others, depression, forceful actions, hallucinations, and other mood or behavior problems have happened during treatment and within 6 months after the last dose. Relapse of drug addiction has also happened. Alpha interferons may also cause or make infections, blood flow problems, or autoimmune diseases worse. Sometimes, these may be deadly. If you think you have any of these health problems, call your doctor right away. Side effects such as high or low blood pressure, a fast or abnormal heartbeat, chest pain or pressure, trouble breathing, heart attacks, and strokes have happened. Closely read the part in this leaflet which lists when to call your doctor. Many times, but not every time, these side effects get better after stopping this drug.

## What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat cancer.

- It is used to treat genital warts.
- It is used to treat perianal warts.
- It is used to treat hepatitis B and C infections.
- It is used to treat skin wounds in patients with AIDS-related Kaposi's sarcoma.
- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

## **What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?**

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have ever had any of these health problems: Autoimmune disease or liver disease.
- If you have any of these health problems: Diabetes or thyroid problems.
- If you have had a transplant.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

## **What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?**

### **All products:**

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert until you see how this drug affects you.

- High blood sugar has happened with this drug. This includes diabetes that is new or worse.
- Check your blood sugar as you have been told by your doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you have signs of high blood sugar like confusion, feeling sleepy, more thirst, more hungry, passing urine more often, flushing, fast breathing, or breath that smells like fruit.
- You may have more chance of getting an infection. Wash hands often. Stay away from people with infections, colds, or flu.
- You may bleed more easily. Be careful and avoid injury. Use a soft toothbrush and an electric razor.
- Have an eye exam as you have been told by your doctor.
- High triglyceride levels have happened with this drug. Tell your doctor if you have ever had high triglyceride levels.
- Very bad and sometimes deadly liver problems have happened with this drug. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of liver problems like dark urine, feeling tired, not hungry, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.
- Some people have had lung problems with this drug. Sometimes, this has been deadly. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of lung problems like shortness of breath or other trouble breathing, cough that is new or worse, or fever.
- This drug may cause eye problems that may lead to loss of eyesight or blindness. Tell your doctor if you have or have ever had eye problems. Call your doctor right away if you have any changes in eyesight.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.
- This drug may affect growth in children and teens in some cases. They may need regular growth checks. Talk with the doctor.
- Use birth control that you can trust to prevent pregnancy while taking this drug.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant, plan on getting pregnant, or are breast-

feeding. You will need to talk about the benefits and risks to you and the baby.

### **Hepatitis infection:**

- It is not known if this drug will prevent liver failure or other liver problems like cancer. Talk with the doctor.
- This drug does not stop the spread of diseases like HIV or hepatitis that are passed through blood or having sex. Do not have any kind of sex without using a latex or polyurethane condom. Do not share needles or other things like toothbrushes or razors.
- This drug may be used with ribavirin. If you are also taking ribavirin, talk with the doctor about the risks and side effects that may happen.

### **Powder:**

- This drug is made from human plasma (part of the blood) and may have viruses that may cause disease. This drug is screened, tested, and treated to lower the chance that it carries an infection. Talk with the doctor.

## **What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?**

**WARNING/CAUTION:** Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Signs of infection like fever, chills, very bad sore throat, ear or sinus pain, cough, more sputum or change in color of sputum, pain with passing urine, mouth sores, or wound that will not heal.
- Signs of a pancreas problem (pancreatitis) like very bad stomach pain, very bad

back pain, or very bad upset stomach or throwing up.

- Signs of thyroid problems like change in weight; feeling nervous, excitable, restless, or weak; hair thinning; depression; neck swelling; not able to focus; trouble with heat or cold; menstrual changes; shakiness; or sweating.
- Mental, mood, or behavior changes that are new or worse.
- Any unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- Black, tarry, or bloody stools.
- Throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds.
- Weakness on 1 side of the body, trouble speaking or thinking, change in balance, drooping on one side of the face, or blurred eyesight.
- Shortness of breath, a big weight gain, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- Very bad headache.
- Very bad belly pain.
- A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.
- Memory problems or loss.
- Feeling confused.
- Trouble walking.
- Not able to pass urine or change in how much urine is passed.
- Anxiety.
- Change in look of teeth or gums.

## **What are some other side effects of this drug?**

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Feeling dizzy, sleepy, tired, or weak.
- Upset stomach or throwing up.

- Irritation where the shot is given.
- Dry mouth.
- Diarrhea or constipation.
- Not hungry.
- Hair thinning.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Change in taste.
- Weight loss.
- Flu-like signs. These include headache, weakness, fever, shakes, aches, pains, and sweating. Mild pain drugs may help.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at <https://www.fda.gov/medwatch>.

## How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

### All products:

- It is given as a shot.
- If you will be giving yourself the shot, your doctor or nurse will teach you how to give the shot.
- Keep using this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.
- Before giving the shot, let it come to room temperature. Do not heat this drug.

- Move the site where you give the shot with each shot.
- Do not give into skin that is irritated, bruised, red, infected, or scarred.
- Do not use if the solution is cloudy, leaking, or has particles.
- Do not use if solution changes color.
- Throw away needles in a needle/sharp disposal box. Do not reuse needles or other items. When the box is full, follow all local rules for getting rid of it. Talk with a doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.
- Drink lots of noncaffeine liquids unless told to drink less liquid by your doctor.
- Take good care of your teeth. See a dentist often.
- If you throw up, rinse your mouth out well.
- Have blood work checked as you have been told by the doctor. Talk with the doctor.
- Avoid alcohol or other drugs and natural products that slow your actions.

### **Powder:**

- This drug must be mixed with sterile water before using. The sterile water that comes with this drug is meant for one use only. Throw away any part of the sterile water that is not used after one use.

### **Prefilled pen:**

- Do not share pen or cartridge devices with another person even if the needle has been changed. Sharing these devices may pass infections from one person to another. This includes infections you may not know you have.

## **What do I do if I miss a dose?**

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

- If you miss taking this drug for a few days in a row, call your doctor before you start taking it again.

## How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

### All products:

- Store in a refrigerator. Do not freeze.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

### Powder:

- After mixing, be sure you know how long the product is good for and how to store it. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.
- Throw away any part of opened vial not used after use.

### Solution:

- After opening, be sure you know how long the product is good for and how to store it. Ask the doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.

### Prefilled pen:

- Put back in the refrigerator right after each use.
- Throw away any part not used after 28 days.

## General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.



- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- This drug comes with an extra patient fact sheet called a Medication Guide. Read it with care. Read it again each time this drug is refilled. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with the doctor, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

## **Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer**

This information should not be used to decide whether or not to take this medicine or any other medicine. Only the healthcare provider has the knowledge and training to decide which medicines are right for a specific patient. This information does not endorse any medicine as safe, effective, or approved for treating any patient or health condition. This is only a brief summary of general information about this medicine. It does NOT include all information about the possible uses, directions, warnings, precautions, interactions, adverse effects, or risks that may apply to this medicine. This information is not specific medical advice and does not replace information you receive from the healthcare provider. You must talk with the healthcare provider for complete information about the risks and benefits of using this medicine.

## **Last Reviewed Date**

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If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly.  
If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM,  
during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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