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ARTHRITIS INFORMATION



GOLD TREATMENT

M E D I C A T I O N S



YOUR SOURCE FOR HELP AND HOPE

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C O N T A C T

The mission of the Arthritis Foundation is to support research to find the cure for and prevention of arthritis and to improve the quality of life for those affected by arthritis.



This pamphlet is written for people who are receiving gold treatments for any form of arthritis or related conditions. The information does not cover all possible uses, actions, precautions, side effects or interactions of gold treatments and should not replace the advice and guidance given by your doctor. If you have questions about this or other medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

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WHAT IS GOLD TREATMENT?

Gold treatment includes the use of different forms of gold compounds. Such treatment is beneficial for some types of arthritis and related diseases because it can:

- help relieve joint pain and stiffness;
- reduce swelling and joint damage;
- reduce the chance of joint deformity and disability;
- improve your ability to do many or all of your normal daily activities.

However, taking gold involves some risks.

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WHEN IS GOLD USED TO TREAT ARTHRITIS?

Many doctors prescribe gold for people with rheumatoid arthritis, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis or psoriatic arthritis. This type of treatment appears to work best in the early stages of arthritis, but it may be effective in anyone with active joint pain and swelling.

Gold often is used with other medicines such as aspirin and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or with cortisone-like drugs, such as prednisone. Doctors frequently prescribe a combination of exercise, physical therapy and rest along with gold treatment.

Before recommending gold treatment, your doctor or rheumatologist (an arthritis specialist) will consider the following questions:

- How severe is your disease?
- How many joints are affected?
- Which joints are affected?
- How has your arthritis responded to other treatments?
- Should other treatments be tried before beginning gold treatment?

- Is there so much joint damage from the arthritis that there will be no significant benefits from gold treatment?
- Do you have any other condition that would make the use of gold more hazardous (for example, severe anemia, kidney disease or certain types of skin conditions)?

You and your doctor can decide whether gold treatment is right for you.

Does Gold Treatment Always Help?

Gold treatment does not help everyone. Arthritis usually improves in about one-half of all people treated with gold early in the course of the disease. Many people who have had arthritis for a longer period of time also may benefit from gold.

However, two to three of every 10 people do not benefit from gold. Another two to three of 10 people stop taking it for other reasons, such as inconvenience or side effects. It is impossible to predict who will benefit from it and who will not.

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HOW DOES IT WORK?

It is not known exactly how gold compounds help rheumatoid arthritis. Gold may affect the inflammatory process that causes the joint pain and swelling.

Does It Cure Arthritis?

Gold does not cure arthritis, but it does help keep the disease under control. On occasion, some people receiving gold treatment go into remission. However, gold treatment mainly relieves the pain caused by active joint swelling. It also may help prevent future joint damage caused by this swelling.

Gold treatment will not repair or correct existing joint damage or deformities. It will not reduce the disability caused by these problems. Other types of treatment may be available for these problems.

How Long Does It Take to Work?

Gold works slowly and gradually. Most people begin to notice a decrease in stiffness, joint pain and/or swelling two to six months after they start taking it.

4 How Long Will You Benefit from Gold Treatment?

The long-term effectiveness of gold treatment varies. In some people, gold continues to be effective for many years; in others, it becomes less effective as time goes on. There is no way to predict how long gold will continue to be beneficial. You should continue to take it as long as your arthritis is under control and you don't have any serious side effects. If you stop taking the medicine while you are feeling better, your arthritis may become active again within several months.

HOW IS IT GIVEN?

Gold can either be injected into a muscle or taken in capsule form (oral gold). You and your doctor can decide which form is best for you. Oral gold may cause fewer side effects, but may not be as effective as injectable gold.

Injections

Gold sodium thiomalate (*Myochrysine*) and aurothioglucose (*Solganal*) are two forms of injectable gold. Injections must be given by a qualified health-care professional. This person will give you a small dose to make sure

you won't have a severe reaction to the medicine. Then you'll receive larger amounts until the full dose is reached. The frequency of the doses is then adjusted, depending upon how your arthritis improves and whether or not you have any side effects. When things are going well, the periods between injections will be increased, sometimes up to four weeks. Since everyone reacts differently to gold, you may or may not require more frequent injections than others.

You may notice that your arthritis seems worse for a day or two after a gold injection. This does not necessarily mean you must stop taking injections, but you should report these symptoms to your doctor.

Capsule Form

Auranofin (*Ridaura*) is an oral form of gold. Doctors usually prescribe two capsules per day. Some doctors prefer to start treatment with a single capsule for the first several weeks. You may be given slightly higher or lower doses from time to time, depending on the side effects and how well your arthritis responds. Never change the dose on your own. Talk with your doctor if you have specific questions about dosage; your pharmacist can answer general questions about the drug.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Not everyone taking gold will have side effects. Most side effects are minor, but some can be serious. Side effects can occur at any time during treatment with gold. They may persist for several months after you stop taking it.

Talk to your doctor about the potential side effects. The benefits of taking the medicine usually outweigh the risks.

Common Side Effects

Contact your doctor right away if you have any of the following side effects:

- **Rash:** This side effect is more frequently associated with injections than capsules. The rash usually is itchy, red and scaly, with bumps. Although it may appear anywhere on the body and can eventually cover the entire body, it usually occurs on the chest, arms and legs. The rash can be severe and uncomfortable. Generally, however, it is mild and affects only a few spots. It usually goes away on its own within several weeks if gold is stopped. Once the rash has disappeared, your doctor may have you resume gold therapy at a lower dose.
- **Mouth sores:** Similar to canker sores, these painful sores can form inside the mouth.
- **Metallic taste:** This problem often disappears when the dosage of gold is lowered.
- **Thinning of the hair:** Likewise, this problem often disappears when the dosage of gold is lowered.
- **Diarrhea/loose stools:** Diarrhea is a common side effect of oral gold; it occasionally occurs with injectable gold. This does not mean you'll have to stop taking the medicine. The problem may go away by itself or disappear if the dose is lowered. Taking a bulk-forming laxative may help manage this side effect. If you have diarrhea for more than a few days or if you have severe abdominal pain, bleeding or other symptoms, contact your doctor as soon as possible.
- **Nitritoid reactions:** These reactions, named because of their resemblance to reactions to nitrites, sometimes occur shortly after an injection of gold sodium thiomalate. You may feel weak, faint, dizzy or nauseous.

Lying down for a few minutes usually helps relieve these symptoms.

Less Common Side Effects

- **Kidney damage:** To detect early signs of kidney problems, urine tests are done regularly during therapy.
- **Damage to the bone marrow** (where the body produces red and white blood cells and platelets): This is uncommon, but can cause serious problems – even death, in rare instances. Your doctor will take regular blood tests to check for this side effect.
- **Liver, intestinal and lung damage:** These have been reported in people treated with gold, but these reactions are very rare.

If any side effects are severe, your doctor will stop the gold treatment. It takes many months for injectable gold to be eliminated from the body, but complete recovery from the side effect usually occurs much sooner. In the meantime, your doctor may treat serious reactions with cortisone-like drugs or other measures. Some side effects can be relieved by reducing the dosage of gold; others can be relieved by temporarily stopping the gold treatment and later resuming the drug at a lower dose. In either case, a doctor's supervision is necessary.

Drug Monitoring

If you are taking gold, it is important that you visit your doctor on a regular basis. In the beginning, your doctor should obtain a blood and urine sample before each injection or once every four to six weeks if you are taking oral gold. The frequency of such testing usually can be decreased with time. If there

are any changes in test results, then the necessary adjustments can be made to the amount of gold you receive.

HOW TO TAKE THIS MEDICINE PROPERLY

Gold treatment will work best for you if you take the medicine correctly. Following are some general rules and responses to common questions about the medicine.

Can You Take It with Other Medicines?

Usually, but it depends upon the medication. Because gold takes a while to begin working, there will be days (especially during the first four to six months of treatment) when you will have some joint pain and swelling. During this time, your doctor may prescribe other medicines to help reduce pain and swelling. Some doctors also may prescribe gold in combination with other anti-inflammatory medicines, such as corticosteroids (*Prednisone*), hydroxychloroquine (*Plaquenil*), or methotrexate (*Rheumatrex*). If the gold is effective, it may be possible to slowly reduce the dose of these medicines or to totally stop them.

Always tell your doctor and pharmacist if you are taking any other prescription or over-the-counter medicines. It is important to know whether other medicines may interact with the gold.

Can You Take It if You're Pregnant or Breast-Feeding?

It is not known how taking gold will affect pregnancy. Animal studies show that gold may cause birth defects or may cause unwanted effects in nursing babies. It's also known that a

small amount of gold (less than 2 percent) gets into breast milk.

If you are planning to have a baby, are pregnant or are breast-feeding, discuss the risks and benefits of gold treatment with your doctor.

Can Children Take It?

Doctors administer gold injections to some children with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (JRA). Oral gold is not recommended for use in children because its safety and effectiveness in young people have not been established.

Can You Take It if You've Taken It Before?

If you had good results with gold, it may be effective when started again. However, you should not take gold again if it caused severe side effects. If gold injections caused certain side effects, you may be able to take oral gold instead without side effects.

How Can You Arrange for Injections When You're Traveling?

Depending on the length of your trip, you may have to arrange for gold injections as well as for blood and urine tests while you're gone. Talk to your doctor about how and where you can do this.

Can You Drink Alcohol while Taking Gold?

It is not believed that a combination of alcohol and gold is harmful. However, it is possible that the side effects of some of the other medications you may be taking can be worsened by alcohol (such as increased stomach problems). Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about what to do if you miss several doses.



What If You Miss a Dose?

Missing one or two doses will not affect you. If you miss many doses, the gold will not work as well. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

CHECKLIST OF DOS AND DON'TS

Do

Before taking gold, tell your doctor:

- if you are planning to become pregnant, are pregnant or are breast-feeding (see pg. 8);
- if you have any other health problems;
- if you are taking any other prescription or over-the-counter medicines; and/or
- if you have taken gold before and why you stopped taking it.

Know these facts about your medicine:

- What is the name?
- What are the possible side effects?
- What do you do if you experience side effects?
- Why you are taking it?
- What is the proper way to take it?
- What should you do if you miss a dose?

Take oral gold exactly as instructed by your doctor. This may involve carrying your medicine with you or keeping a supply in a separate location (such as your workplace).

Read the package insert that comes with your medicine. If you have problems or questions, call your doctor or pharmacist.

Ask family and friends to read this booklet. The more they know, the more they'll be able to help you if you have problems.

Don't

Do not reduce the dose or stop taking your medicine without contacting your doctor, unless you have already discussed this.

Do not double the dose if you miss one. Do not share your medicines with other people who have similar medical problems. Tell them to visit a doctor.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact your local Arthritis Foundation for a list of free brochures about arthritis and its treatments. Arthritis Foundation services available in your area may include:

- **Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program** – Join in the fun of a six- to 10-week exercise program in a heated pool.
- **Arthritis Self-Help Course** – Learn how to take control of your own care in this six-week (15-hour) class for people with arthritis.
- **Support groups and clubs** – Share your successes and problems with others, and get tips on how to overcome problems caused by arthritis.

THE ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION

The Arthritis Foundation is the source of help and hope for nearly 40 million Americans who have arthritis. The Foundation supports research to cure and prevent arthritis and seeks to improve the quality of life for those affected by arthritis.

As a not-for-profit organization, the Arthritis Foundation relies on public contributions to fund research and provide service programs. You can become a member of the Arthritis Foundation and help support the fight against arthritis. Please contact your local chapter or complete and mail the membership form in the back of this brochure. You will receive materials about the benefits of membership, including the award-winning bimonthly magazine *Arthritis Today*.



MEDICATION FORM

Complete this form with your doctor and post it where you can refer to it easily.

Name of your medication: _____

Why you take it: _____

How much you take: _____

When you take it: _____

Side effects you should be aware of: _____

Doctor's name and phone number: _____

Pharmacy name and phone number: _____

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Membership includes a one-year subscription (six issues plus one bonus issue) to *Arthritis Today*. Each issue brings you a variety of helpful and interesting articles covering arthritis research and treatment, diet and nutrition, financial planning strategies, tips for traveling and ways you can make your life with arthritis easier and more rewarding.

You'll also have access to a wide range of local chapter activities. Many chapters offer exercise programs, classes on self-care, support groups and a physician referral service. Plus, your membership helps fund research to find cures for America's #1 crippling disease.

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