

Upadacitinib - Medication Information

What is upadacitinib?

Upadacitinib (brand name: Rinvoq®) is a medication used to treat ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. It is in a class of medications called Janus kinase (JAK) that slow down the immune system's activity to heal inflammation.

How is upadacitinib given?

Upadacitinib comes as a tablet, or pill, taken by mouth. In the first 3 months, it is typically taken at a dose of 45 mg, once a day. Once the medication starts working, the dose can be lowered to 15 mg, once a day.

What should I do if I miss a dose of upadacitinib?

Take your missed dose as soon as you remember. However, if it is almost time for your next dose (12 hours or less), skip the missed dose and continue with your next dose as scheduled. Do not take 2 doses at the same time.

When can I expect upadacitinib to work?

Upadacitinib works for most patients, usually soon after starting the medication. Some patients may feel an improvement in symptoms as soon as 1-2 weeks of starting upadacitinib. Some patients may need to give it some time for the medication to start working. Typically, up to 2 months is required to see a benefit. If a patient does not see any improvement after taking the medication for 2 months, the likelihood of it working for them at all is low.

What tests are needed while I am on upadacitinib?

Before beginning upadacitinib treatment, you will need blood tests to check for hepatitis B and tuberculosis infections. You may also need to test for tuberculosis every year. Blood counts and liver tests are done every 4 months while on upadacitinib.

Upadacitinib can increase cholesterol levels. Therefore, cholesterol (lipid) panel checks are recommended before and periodically while on upadacitinib.

What are the potential side effects of upadacitinib?

Side effects of upadacitinib may include:

Allergic reaction: Patients may develop allergic reactions to upadacitinib as with any other medication. Reactions may include rash, hives, swelling of the lips or throat. This is uncommon and can be treated with steroid and anti-histamine medications. This is uncommon and can be treated with steroid and antihistamine medications.

Infection: As with other medications that act on the immune system, upadacitinib can increase your risk of infections. Upper respiratory tract infections (cough, runny nose, sneezing, etc.) were the most common side effect, but only occurred in a few patients. Serious infections are uncommon, but serious medical conditions like uncontrolled diabetes or lung disease may increase this risk.

Shingles: Upadacitinib may also increase the risk of shingles infection (Herpes zoster). The shingles vaccine 2-dose series (brand name: Shingrix®) is recommended.

High cholesterol: Upadacitinib can increase both good and bad cholesterol levels. While it has not shown to increase heart disease risk, some patients need to start a cholesterol lowering medication.

Blot clot: Upadacitinib works similarly to another medication called tofacitinib. In a research study, older patients with heart disease risk factors on tofacitinib for rheumatoid arthritis had a slightly increased risk of blood clots in the vein (venous thromboembolism). However, this increased risk of blood clots was not seen in patients on tofacitinib for inflammatory bowel disease.

Lymphoma: Upadacitinib can also increase the risk of lymphoma, a form of cancer of the lymph node. The risk is low, but patients who are current or past smokers may be at a higher risk.

Please see the medication package insert for the full list of potential side effects.

Is upadacitinib safe during pregnancy and breastfeeding?

There is very limited data on the safety of upadacitinib during pregnancy or breastfeeding. However, animal studies have shown some risk to the baby during pregnancy. Women should use reliable birth control while on upadacitinib and for 4 weeks after stopping it. Do not breastfeed while on upadacitinib and for at least 6 days after stopping it.

How can I take care of my health while on upadacitinib?

It is important to be up to date with your health maintenance while on upadacitinib. This includes being current on all the recommended vaccines such as the flu, COVID-19, pneumococcal, and shingles vaccines. You should only get the recombinant shingles vaccine (brand name: Shingrix®). Do not get the older shingles vaccines that contain the live but weakened virus. You should not get any live virus vaccines while on upadacitinib or for 3 months after stopping it.

It is also important to be up to date in your general cancer screening including mammograms and pap smears for women, and skin check-ups for both men and women.

Speak to your primary care doctor about whether you are up to date on all your vaccines and cancer screening.

What if I have questions about upadacitinib?

Talk with your provider about any questions or concerns you may have about upadacitinib.

This document has been reviewed for plain language by Blum Center staff.

