

ETANERCEPT (ENBREL)

Etanercept (Enbrel) is a promising new treatment for psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. Enbrel was approved by the FDA for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis in 1997. The treatments that help rheumatoid arthritis also help psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis so the medication has been out for many years in the treatment of other conditions. Enbrel is one of the classic drugs called biologics. These drugs are engineered from proteins produced by living cells. There were new research focuses on psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis being caused by an overactive immune system. This medication specifically targets a substance called tumor necrosis factor which is responsible for causing the inflammation, redness and scaling of the psoriasis.

In the past psoriasis was treated with either local treatment such as creams or ointments or whole body treatment such as phototherapy or oral medications. In many cases, these treatments can be effective but in other cases were not successful. In addition some of the oral medications have potential long term side effects which would be best avoided.

Enbrel is a medication that is self injected twice per week. This administration is quite easy to perform and we will instruct you on the proper way to do this. All of the materials are supplied with the prescription.

Side effects with this treatment are usually rare. The most frequent side effect is slight tenderness at the site where the medication is injected. This usually goes away in spite of continuing the treatment. If these areas are bothersome, then Tylenol (acetaminophen) or Motrin (ibuprofen) would be helpful. As with any medications, there are potential for allergic reactions. This is quite rare with Enbrel. Because Enbrel works on areas of the immune system there are theoretical risks for increased infections and lymphoma. This requires you to be aware of your general health and report any problems such as a lingering cold or fever. There have also been rare reports of Enbrel unmasking or worsening symptoms of multiple sclerosis or causing congestive heart failure to get worse. If you have a history of this problem or any neurologic problems, please let me know.

Enbrel is a medication which is potentially a great advance over previous treatments for psoriasis. It seems to work as well as the more conventional internal medications with fewer side effects. If you have any other questions regarding this medication, please ask me before you leave the office.