

Multiple Sclerosis

All About MS

Posted by: **Thixia** | April 11, 2008

Copaxone

Brand Name

Glatiramer Acetate (Subcutaneous Route)

Common Name

Copaxone

Description

Glatiramer acetate is used in the treatment of the relapsing-remitting form of multiple sclerosis (MS). This medicine will not cure MS, but may extend the time between relapses.

This medicine is available only with your doctor's prescription.

This product is available in the following dosage forms:

Pre-filled syringes.

How does this medication work? What will it do for me?

Glatiramer belongs to a group of medications known as immunomodulators. Immunomodulators modify the way our body's defense system works. Glatiramer is used to treat the relapsing-remitting form of multiple sclerosis (MS). MS is a disease that affects the way the nerves in our body work. It is an autoimmune disease (the immune system attacks the body), and cannot be spread from person to person.

In MS, damage occurs to the myelin sheath, a protective layer that wraps around a nerve, like insulation around electrical wiring. Normally, this sheath allows electrical messages to be sent down the nerve quickly and efficiently. If this insulation is injured, electrical signals in the central nervous system will not be sent properly. For unknown reasons, in MS, the immune system sees the myelin as foreign and attacks it.

Glatiramer is thought to help treat multiple sclerosis by altering the immune system in such a way that its harmful effects on the myelin sheath are reduced. It does not cure MS, but it may increase the time between relapses of the disease.

Your doctor may have suggested this medication for conditions other than the ones listed in these drug information articles. If you have not discussed this with your doctor or are not sure why you are taking this medication, speak to your doctor. Do not stop taking this medication without consulting your doctor.

Do not give this medication to anyone else, even if they have the same symptoms as you do. It can be harmful for people to take this medication if their doctor has not prescribed it.

Before Using

In deciding to use a medicine, the risks of taking the medicine must be weighed against the good it will do. This is a decision you and your doctor will make. For this medicine, the following should be considered:

Allergies

Tell your doctor if you have ever had any unusual or allergic reaction to this medicine or any other medicines. Also tell your health care professional if you have any other types of allergies, such as to foods, dyes, preservatives, or animals. For non-prescription products, read the label or package ingredients carefully.

How should I use this medication?

The recommended dose of glatiramer is 20 mg injected under the skin once a day. Glatiramer is available as an injection only. It comes in vials and pre-filled syringes.

There are special directions enclosed in the package with the injection. Read these directions carefully before using the medication and follow them closely. If you fail to follow the instructions closely, you may accidentally contaminate the medication or needle and give yourself an infection, or you may damage the equipment or lose the medication.

Many things can affect the dose of a medication that a person needs, such as body weight, other medical conditions, and other medications. If your doctor has recommended a dose different from the ones listed here, do not change the way that you are taking the medication without consulting your doctor.

It is important that this medication be taken exactly as prescribed by your doctor. If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you do not remember until the following day, skip the missed dose and continue with your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed one.

Store the vials and prefilled syringes in the fridge and protect them from light. The vials contain a powder form of the medication, and come with a separate vial of

sterile water to mix with the powder to form the solution for injection. Store the sterile water vials at room temperature. The vials may also be stored at room temperature for up to 2 weeks, and the prefilled syringes at room temperature for up to one week. Each prefilled syringe is for single use only.

Keep this medication out of the reach of children.

What form(s) does this medication come in?

Each prefilled syringe contains a sterile solution equivalent with the glatiramer acetate reconstituted solution i.e., 20 mg/mL glatiramer acetate and mannitol 40 mg in Sterile Water for Injection.

Some medications may have other generic brands available. Always ask your doctor or pharmacist about the safety of switching between brands of the same medication.

Who should NOT take this medication?

Glatiramer should not be taken by anyone who is allergic to any of the ingredients of the medication.

What side effects are possible with this medication?

Many medications can cause side effects. A side effect is an unwanted response to a medication when it is taken in normal doses. Side effects can be mild or severe, temporary or permanent. The side effects listed below are not experienced by everyone who takes this medication. If you are concerned about side effects, discuss the risks and benefits of this medication with your doctor.

The following side effects have been reported by at least 1% of people taking this medication. Many of these side effects can be managed, and some may go away on their own over time.

Contact your doctor if you experience these side effects and they are severe or bothersome. Your pharmacist may be able to advise you on managing side effects.

The most common side effects of glatiramer occur at the site of injection and may include:

redness

pain

swelling

itching

a lump

Some people have a rare reaction that starts immediately after the injection and consists of flushing, chest tightness with racing or pounding heartbeat, anxiety, and difficulty breathing. The symptoms of this reaction usually last about 15 minutes and go away without further problems. Nevertheless, if you experience any dizziness, hives and itching, sweating, chest pain, or difficulty breathing, you should contact a doctor right away.

The following side effects may go away as your body becomes used to the medicine; check with your doctor if they continue or become bothersome.

More common:

increased sweating

nausea

trembling

unusual tiredness or weakness

vomiting

Less common:

runny nose

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