Tetracycline Treatment of Skin Disorders

Tetracycline is an antibiotic taken internally for treatment of acne and such other skin conditions as rosacea, periocular dermatitis, and rosaceaform dermatitis. Since tetracycline does not cure, but only suppresses the skin disorder, the antibiotic needs to be continued until the disease runs its course. It may be necessary to continue taking tetracycline for months or years. Long-term treatment with tetracycline is remarkably safe. We have had over 50 years experience with it.

Dosage

Patients differ in the amount of tetracycline they need. The amount necessary to control your skin disorder may be as little as one pill a day or as much as six pills daily. Whatever the total number of pills, take them twice daily with a full glass of water. Take half the total amount when you get up in the morning and the other half in the mid afternoon or early evening.

Tetracycline is best absorbed on an empty stomach, since foods (especially dairy products and iron) interfere with absorption of tetracycline. The pharmacist will recommend taking tetracycline one hour before or two hours after meals. This may be difficult to do for any length of time. Taking the medication 15-30 minutes after mealtime should be adequate.

Cautions

Tetracycline is a remarkably safe medicine. Many people have taken it for more than 10 years without problems. However, no medication is without side effects, so please read the following precautions.

1. Tetracycline interacts with birth control pills and may possibly cause birth control pills to fail. Birth control pills are not 100% effective. There have been rare pregnancies even when they are taken faithfully. We don't know whether tetracyclines, or other antibiotics used in treating acne, significantly increase this failure rate. For many years women have successfully combined birth control pills with tetracycline in treating their acne. Most dermatologists continue to prescribe tetracycline for women taking birth control pills.

2. Tetracycline may make you sunburn more easily. The sun sensitivity depends on the amount of tetracycline you are taking. On one or two pills a day, there is little increase in sensitivity. On four pills a day, most people will be sun sensitive. Using a sun screen is always important, but even more so when you are on tetracycline.
3. Tetracycline causes a vaginal yeast infection in some women. It may result in itching and a vaginal discharge. This side effect is annoying, but harmless. It responds promptly to treatment with nonprescription medications. Do not stop the tetracycline if this occurs.

4. Stomach and intestinal side effects may occur. A little nausea or mild cramps may disappear as you get used to the medicine. However, vomiting, severe cramps or diarrhea mean you should stop the medicine and call this office or your personal physician.

5. Tetracycline interacts in the digestive tract with calcium, iron, and antacids to form insoluble compounds. As a result, you do not absorb the tetracycline and you do not get benefit from the iron, calcium, or antacids. You should allow at least two hours between taking the tetracycline and any of those medicines.

6. A very rare side effect of tetracycline and some other medications is the overproduction of fluid by the brain. This results in severe headaches, nausea, and blurry vision. This disappears when the medication is stopped.

**Reasons for not taking tetracycline**

1. Pregnancy.
2. Nursing an infant.
3. Age under eight years as tetracycline may cause permanent discoloration of the teeth.
4. Taking barbiturates or Dilantin as tetracycline may interact.

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