



Patient & Family Guide  
2016

# 5-Aminosalicylate (5-ASA)



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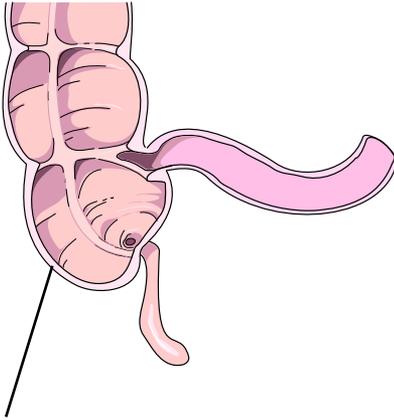
## What is a 5-ASA?

5-aminosalicylate (5-ASA) is a type of drug often used to treat inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). This type of drug is good at controlling active ulcerative colitis or Crohn's colitis as well as keeping ulcerative colitis in remission. There are a variety of 5-ASA drugs available (Asacol<sup>®</sup>, Mezavant<sup>®</sup>, Pentasa<sup>®</sup>, Salofalk<sup>®</sup>, Dipentum<sup>®</sup>). The one that is best for you will depend on where the inflammation (swelling, redness, irritation) is located in your bowel. Some of these drugs work better in the small bowel and some work better in the large bowel. 5-ASA is similar to aspirin because it lowers inflammation.

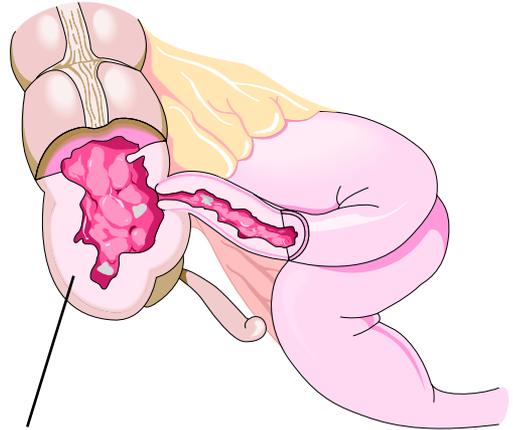
## What do 5-ASAs do?

In IBD, there is inflammation on the inside lining of your intestines. 5-ASA drugs have immunosuppressive (anti-rejection) effects and decrease inflammation in the gastrointestinal tract. Their main anti-inflammatory effect is on the lining of the bowel.

5-ASA drugs stop certain immune system cells from working and lower the amount of chemicals in the intestine that cause diarrhea. These drugs can help reduce the inflammation that can trigger your symptoms.



Normal intestinal wall



Inflamed IBD intestinal wall

## Which 5-ASA should I take?

Your doctor will help you find the right 5-ASA for your signs and symptoms. The type of drug and the amount taken depends on the site and severity of your disease.

Each of the 5-ASA drugs works differently. Most come as a tablet, suppository, or enema. Some patients with proctitis (colitis of the rectum) or colitis of the last metre of the bowel may find a 5-ASA taken in the rectum works better than tablet taken by mouth.

## **Continuing to take the drug**

5-ASA is a family of maintenance drugs. These drugs are usually used long term to control symptoms, lower the number of flare-ups, and help you stay in remission. Taking your medication as prescribed is important. Stopping treatment can increase the risk of flare-ups.

Taking less of the drug may be possible after many years of being well. Talk about this with your doctor.

## **Talk to your doctor**

Talk with your doctor about your questions about this drug. Please remember it is important to talk with your doctor about tapering (lowering) the dose of your 5-ASA.

## **What other medication can I take?**

It is important to talk to your doctor before taking any new medication while taking a 5-ASA. Also, if you have an allergy to aspirin, it is important to let your doctor know since 5-ASA and aspirin have a similar chemical structure.

## **What will get better while I take 5-ASA?**

The main goal of the treatment is to reduce the inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract which leads to the symptoms of IBD.

The main actions of 5-ASA are to reduce flare-ups and keep your IBD in remission.

The benefits of the medication and how fast they happen can be a bit different depending on formulations, dose, and the severity of your disease.

Improvements may be seen within 3 to 21 days from the start of your treatment, but it can also take up to 3 weeks before you see improvement. It may take more time for enemas, suppositories, and pills to take effect.

**What are your questions?**

**Please ask. We are here to help you.**

## **Common side effects of 5-ASAs**

5-ASA drugs are generally easy to take and very well-tolerated. All drugs have possible side effects; however, most often patients do not have any problems. The dosage and the 5-ASA formulation may affect any side effects.

### **Talk to your doctor if you have:**

- › Headache
- › Diarrhea (slow introduction of the drug and taking it with food can help)
- › Flatulence (gas)
- › Hair loss
- › Skin rash/irritation
- › Belly pain/nausea
- › Dizziness
- › Constipation (trouble going to the bathroom)
- › Abnormal bloodwork results
- › Sore throat that doesn't go away
- › Acne (pimples), mild to severe

## **Rare side effects:**

In less than 1% of patients, potentially serious side effects can happen. These include:

- Inflammation of the lung (pneumonitis)
- Inflammation of the tissue around the heart (pericarditis)
- Inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis)
- Worse inflammation of the bowel (colitis)

**Inflammation of the kidney can also happen; however, this can be found through routine blood work during the first few months of treatment.**

**It is important to remember that these side effects are very rare and usually get better when the medication is stopped.**

In general, the potential benefits of taking this medication outweigh the potential risks.

Write down your questions or concerns to talk about with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist here, or on the back cover space:

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