

## What will happen while you are on treatment for Chagas disease?

You will need to have a follow-up appointment and a blood test 1 week after starting treatment with benznidazole, and then after you have finished the course.

## What should you do if you suffer side effects while you are taking benznidazole?

If you experience any side effects while you are taking benznidazole, or if you have any questions about your treatment, you should contact us at:

### **The Hospital for Tropical Diseases**

0203 456 7891 / 0203 447 5990

Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm.

It is helpful if you have your personal record number (MRN) and the name of the doctor who saw you in your last appointment. You can find this information on the correspondence you will have received from the HTD. You will be assessed on the telephone and you may be asked to come into the clinic for an assessment, or to wait until your next appointment.

If you have any problems outside working hours that require urgent medical attention, you should go to your nearest emergency medical service.

You should always mention that you are taking benznidazole to other doctors or pharmacists before taking any other medications.

## How effective is the treatment?

Drug treatment for Chagas Disease is most effective in children and in acute forms of the disease (around 100% of cases are successfully treated), and less effective when the infection has been present for many years (around 40% of these cases are successfully treated).

To know whether your treatment has been effective, you will stay under the care of the Chagas Clinic and you will have annual appointments and blood tests. If the parasite has not been successfully eliminated after you complete treatment, you may need to repeat the course.

### **Contact us:**

Email: [ukchagashub@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:ukchagashub@lshtm.ac.uk)

website: <http://www.thehtd.org/chagasuk.aspx>

twitter: @ukchagashub

facebook: UK Chagas Hub

### **The Hospital for Tropical Diseases**

Mortimer Market Centre,  
Capper St, London WC1E 6JB  
0203 456 7891 / 0203 447 5990  
Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm.

*Thank you  
for taking the time to read this leaflet*

# Treatment of Chagas Disease



### *Patient Information Leaflet*



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## What is Chagas disease?

Chagas disease is caused by a parasite (called *Trypanosoma cruzi*). It affects around 7 million people worldwide. The parasite is found in Central and South America and mainly affects people living in rural areas. How common it is varies from country to country. Rates are highest in Bolivia where up to 70% of people are affected in some areas.

Chagas disease cannot be passed from person to person. It is spread by insects called triatomine bugs (these have other names in Latin America, including 'vinchuca' or 'chirimacha'). Less commonly Chagas disease can be spread by blood transfusion and organ transplantation. All blood products and donated organs are tested in the UK to reduce this risk. Finally, during pregnancy the parasite can be passed to the baby by infected mothers. This is called congenital infection.

## What are the symptoms?

Immediately after becoming infected, some people can experience a mild illness with fever which gets better by itself. Many people have no symptoms at all (called the indeterminate phase). However, one in three people can develop problems after years or decades. These are mainly heart conditions, including heart failure or an abnormal rhythm. The person might also feel breathless, develop swollen ankles, or feel faint or collapse. Problems with the digestive system can also occur.

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## When is treatment recommended?

Treatment is recommended in the following situations

- Patients with chronic or indeterminate infection (before symptoms develop) or with mild or moderate symptoms
- Congenital infection (infection acquired by the baby during pregnancy)
- Acute (recent) infection
- Reactivation during immunosuppression.

## Who will treat your infection?

Treatment for Chagas Disease should be managed by doctors in a specialist centre, such as the Hospital for Tropical Diseases (HTD), which has experience treating patients with Chagas disease.

## How is Chagas disease treated?

There are two available drugs to treat Chagas disease, called benznidazole and nifurtimox. In the UK we use benznidazole. Previously this treatment was for 60 days but recent research indicates that 14 days is just as effective.

You will have an initial appointment at the HTD where you will be assessed and then your doctor will prescribe the correct dose of benznidazole for you. As this drug is not available in the UK, it must be requested from overseas and this may take 2-4 weeks. You should not start taking the drug until your doctor says that you are ready. It is important that your doctor knows on which date you started your treatment so that your follow up can be planned.

You do not need to be admitted to hospital to receive benznidazole.

You may need to take some days off work while you are taking benznidazole if you suffer side effects.

## What are the side effects of benznidazole?

Many people taking benznidazole have side effects. However, **it is important to remember that these are mild, and they are reversible** (they disappear by themselves or after the medicine has been stopped). They can also normally be managed with medication.

Mild side effects include:

- Rash (up to 50% of patients)
- Nausea or vomiting (15%)
- Headache, tiredness, or sleep difficulties (40%)

Serious side effects are very infrequent, and these include:

- Nerve inflammation
- Blood abnormalities (such as anaemia or low white blood cell count).