



## **Jeff Donovan MD PhD FRCPC**

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### **INFORMATION ON SULFASALAZINE**

#### **What is Sulfasalazine?**

- Sulfasalazine is a medication which is commonly used in treating inflammatory bowel disease and rheumatoid arthritis but has been shown to be helpful in a proportion of patients with alopecia areata
- About 25 % of patients with alopecia areata will have benefit with sulfasalazine

#### **How is it Sulfasalazine prescribed?**

- Dr. Donovan will advise how this is to be used in your specific situation
- Baseline blood tests will be ordered before you start sulfasalazine (complete blood counts, kidney and liver, folate, B12 levels, urinalysis with microscopy, G6PD)
- Blood tests will be checked every 2 weeks for 2 months, then every 4 weeks for 3 months and then ever 3 months.

#### **Who should not take Sulfasalazine?**

- Do not take sulfasalazine if you are allergic to sulfa drugs or aspirin
- Do not take sulfasalazine if you have a disorder known as porphyria
- Do not take sulfasalazine if you are pregnant

#### **Do any medications interact with Sulfasalazine?**

Tell your doctor if you are on any of these medications.

- Digoxin
- Imuran, methotrexate, cyclosporine
- Ibuprofen
- Coumadin

## **What are the side effects of Sulfasalazine?**

The following are more common side effects:

- Nausea and headache (often the earliest side effects and can be treated by lowering the dose)
- Diarrhea, vomiting, loss of appetite are common (GI side effects are common – taking with food or using enteric coated tablets can reduce these side effects); dyspepsia can be treated with antacids.
- Dizziness
- Increased sensitivity of the skin to the light
- May cause urine & skin to turn dark yellow or orange (this is harmless)
- Rashes
- Aching joints

### **Less Common or rare side effects include:**

- Drop in blood counts
- Irritation of the lungs, liver, pancreas
- Lowered platelet counts
- Mood changes, including severe depression
- Men are infertile while on the drug, but it is reversed when the drug is stopped

### **Serious side effects include the following:**

- Bruising of the skin, jaundiced skin and eyes, pale skin
- Difficulty swallowing
- Weakness

### **Under what situations should I stop Sulfasalazine ?**

- Stop the drug if you feel unwell
- Stop the drug if you develop sore throat, fever, pallor, bruising, or jaundice (yellowing of the skin), abdominal pain as these may be indications of serious problems

