

Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) for Autoimmune Diseases

What is hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®)?

Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) is a medication to help manage symptoms of autoimmune diseases like joint pain, swelling, and skin rashes. You should take this medication exactly as your doctor says. Your doctors will ask you to have regular eye exams and check your hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) blood levels every so often to make sure that you are taking the correct dose for your condition.

How is hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) prescribed?

Doses for adults with autoimmune diseases range from 200-400 mg per day. In some cases, higher doses are used. You can take this medication as a single daily dose, or in 2 divided doses (if taking more than 1 pill per day).

Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) is available in both pill and liquid forms.

- **Pill form:** The pill is available in 100 mg and 200 mg tablets. The maker of the medication suggests that you don't crush or split the tablets. This is mostly because of concerns about the pills tasting bad, and also making sure you get an accurate dose amount when you split a tablet in half. However, the medication will still be effective even if you split or crush the pills, so your provider may still recommend splitting or cutting the pills using an over-the-counter pill cutter. Pharmacists are also available to give you guidance on how to properly split tablets.
- **Liquid form:** The liquid medication form contains a dose of 25 mg per 1 milliliter (mL). To make sure you get the correct dose, you will need to use a compounding pharmacy.

Why do I need eye exams when I am taking hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®)?

Your Rheumatology care team (including your doctor, nurses, and medical assistants) will monitor your eye health while you are on this medication. We will ask you to have eye exams and work with you and your eye doctor to get the results of the exams. This is because there is a small chance that you may have changes to your eyesight or experience loss of vision when you take this medication.

You have a higher risk of developing these eye problems if:

- You have been taking the medication for more than 5 years.
- You are taking a high dose of the medication.
- You already have eye (retinal) disease.
- You already have kidney, liver, or heart disease.
- You are currently taking tamoxifen, a medication used to treat cancer.

How often do I need eye exams?

You will have eye exams when you start taking the medication, and then every year (if you are at higher risk for eye disease). We will remind you to complete and send us your yearly eye exams when you are at your Rheumatology clinic visit or when you contact us to refill your medication.

What type of eye exams do I need?

Different types of exams help your eye doctor to find eye damage that may be related to your medication use. These include:

- **Humphrey Visual Field (HVF) test:** During this test, you sit down and look into a bowl-like machine. Small lights flash at different places inside the bowl. When you see the lights, you press a button. This test tells your doctor if you've developed blind spots in your field of vision.

- **Ocular Coherence Tomography (OCT) test:** During this test, you look into a machine that scans your eyes and takes pictures to create a 3-D image of your eye. This test can help your eye doctor look for early signs of eye damage.
- **Dilated retinal exam:** During this exam, your provider places eye drops in your eyes to keep the pupil open as they look into your eye. This exam helps your doctor see the back of your eye for signs of eye damage.

You will need different eye exams depending on how long you have been taking hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) and your risk of developing eye problems.

- **When you first start** taking the medication, you will need to do all 3 of these exams **once**.
- **After 5 years** of taking the medication, or **if you are at higher risk**, you will need to do all 3 of these exams **every year**.

Where can I have my eye exams done?

You can go to any eye care provider (ophthalmologist or optometrist) for your eye exams. If you have your exams at the Michigan Medicine Kellogg Eye Center, we will be able to see your results after your visit. If you go to another provider, ask your eye doctor to fax your eye exam results to our clinic: Adult Rheumatology Clinic, fax number: (734) 936-3695.

What happens if I do not have my eye exams done?

It is important that you have your eye exams done when your doctor asks you to. If you do not have your eye exams, we will not know if you have eye damage. We may hold your medication refills until you can get your eye exams done. We will remind you when to get your eye exams and work with you to answer any questions.

What happens if I have eye damage?

Your eye doctor will tell you and us if they find any signs of eye damage. We will also receive a report of your eye exam results. If we are concerned that you might have eye damage related to your medication, we will contact you to discuss your treatment plan. Do not stop taking hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) unless your doctor has told you to.

What is the hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) blood test, and why is it important?

The hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) test is a lab blood test used to measure the level of the medication in your body. Checking hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) blood levels helps us make sure you are taking the correct dose for your condition. It also helps your doctors determine if the levels are too high and they need to lower your dose.

How often do I need to have the hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) blood test?

How often you need this blood test depends on your rheumatic disease, as well as other things like how long you've been on the medication, your dose, your kidney function, and whether you are taking other medications that may interact with it. Your doctor will determine the appropriate testing schedule for you.

Who do I call with questions?

Please call our clinic at (888) 229-3065 or send us a message through the [MyUofMHealth.org](https://myuofmhealth.org) patient portal if you have questions.

Where can I learn more about hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) and autoimmune disease treatment?

Read more about this on the American College of Rheumatology website at:
rheumatology.org/patients/hydroxychloroquine-plaquenil

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