

Peginterferon alfa-2a (Pegasys)

About This Medicine

PEGINTERFERON ALFA-2a (peg in ter FEER on AL fa 2 a) treats infections caused by the hepatitis B and C viruses. It works by limiting the spread of the viruses inside the body. This medication does not kill the virus and it may still be possible to spread the virus to others. It will not treat colds, the flu, or infections caused by bacteria. It is given as an injection under the skin (subcutaneously).

This medicine may be used for other purposes; ask your care team if you have questions.

Possible Side Effects

- Tiredness and weakness
- Headache
- Fever
- Muscle pain/aching

Note: Each of the side effects above was reported in greater than 40% of people treated with peginterferon alfa-2a. All possible side effects are not included. Your side effects may be different depending on your cancer diagnosis, condition, or if you are receiving other medicines in combination. Please discuss any concerns or questions with your care team.

Warnings and Precautions

- Severe depression and other psychiatric disorders such as mood changes, thoughts of hurting yourself or others, aggressive behavior, hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there), and suicide
- Changes in the function of the heart, including abnormal heartbeat, risk of heart attack, and/or high blood pressure
- Severe bone marrow suppression -this is a decrease in the number of white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets. This may raise your risk of infection, make you tired and weak, and raise your risk of bleeding.
- Autoimmune problems - you may develop problems such as rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, and psoriasis. If you already have an autoimmune disorder, it may get worse during treatment.
- Changes in your thyroid function
- Blood sugar levels may change, and you may develop diabetes

- Blurred vision or other changes in eyesight, including retinal changes (thin membrane that covers the back of the eye) and loss of vision
- Risk of stroke. Symptoms of a stroke are as sudden numbness or weakness of your face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of your body; sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding; sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes; sudden trouble walking, feeling dizzy, loss of balance or coordination; or sudden bad headache with no known cause. **If you have any of these symptoms for 2 minutes, call 911.**
- Severe changes in your liver function, which can be life-threatening. If you have hepatitis B, it may get worse during treatment.
- Changes in your lung function such as pneumonia, inflammation (swelling) and/or scarring of the lungs, or increased blood pressure in the arteries of your lungs, which may be life-threatening. You may have a cough and/or trouble breathing.
- Risk of severe and life-threatening infections
- Colitis – inflammation (swelling) in the colon, which can be life-threatening. Symptoms are diarrhea (loose bowel movements), stomach cramping, and sometimes blood in the bowel movements.
- Inflammation of your pancreas, which may be life-threatening
- Allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis, are rare but may happen in some patients. Signs of allergic reaction to this medicine may be swelling of the face, feeling like your tongue or throat are swelling, trouble breathing, rash, itching, fever, chills, feeling dizzy, and/or feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way. **If this happens, do not take another dose of this medicine. You should get urgent medical treatment.**
- Severe allergic skin reaction. You may develop blisters on your skin that are filled with fluid or a severe red rash all over your body that may be painful.
- Effects on the nerves called peripheral neuropathy, when peginterferon alfa-2a is given in combination with telbivudine. You may feel numbness, tingling, or pain in your hands and feet. It may be hard for you to button your clothes, open jars, or walk as usual. The effect on the nerves may get worse with more doses of the medicine. These effects get better in some people after the medicine is stopped but it does not get better in all people.

Note: Some of the side effects above are very rare. If you have concerns and/or questions, please discuss them with your medical team.

Important Information

- This medicine may impair your ability to drive or use machinery. Use caution and talk to your care team about any precautions you may need to take.
- Tell your care team if you ever have been addicted to drugs and/or alcohol or have a history of depression.

How to Take Your Medication

- Talk to your care team for proper preparation, dosing, and administration if you are self-injecting this medicine.
- **Missed dose:** If you miss a dose, contact your care team right away.



- **Overdosage:** If you think you have taken too much of this medicine contact a poison control center or emergency room at once.
- **Handling:** Wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling your medicine. Your caretakers should not handle your medicine with bare hands and should wear latex gloves.
- This medicine may be present in the urine, stool and other body fluids such as blood, vomit, semen, and vaginal fluids. Take precautions to prevent others from coming in contact with your medicine or your body fluids. Follow safety precautions during your treatment and for as long as directed by your care team after your treatment. If you take a pill each day, follow these precautions every day.
- **Storage:** Store this medicine in the refrigerator between 36°F to 46°F (2°C to 8°C). Store this medicine in the original carton to protect it from light. Do not shake or freeze. Do not leave out of the refrigerator for more than 24 hours. Keep out of the reach of children and pets.
- **Disposal:** Discuss with your care team how to dispose of unused medicine/needles.

Treating Side Effects

- Manage tiredness by pacing your activities for the day.
- Be sure to include periods of rest between energy-draining activities.
- Get regular exercise, with your care team's approval. If you feel too tired to exercise vigorously, try taking a short walk.
- To decrease the risk of infection, wash your hands regularly.
- Avoid close contact with people who have a cold, the flu, or other infections.
- Take your temperature as your care team tells you, and whenever you feel like you may have a fever.
- To help decrease the risk of bleeding, use a soft toothbrush. Check with your care team before using dental floss.
- Be very careful when using knives or tools.
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor.
- Drink enough fluids to keep your urine pale yellow.
- Ask your care team about medicine that is available to help stop or lessen diarrhea.
- Keeping your pain under control is important to your well-being. Please tell your care team if you are experiencing pain.
- If you have diabetes, keep good control of your blood sugar level. Tell your care team if your glucose levels are higher or lower than normal.
- If you have numbness and tingling in your hands and feet, be careful when cooking, walking, and handling sharp objects and hot liquids.
- If you get a rash do not put anything on it unless your care team says you may. Keep the area around the rash clean and dry. Ask your care team for medicine if your rash bothers you.

Food and Medicine Interactions

- There are no known interactions of peginterferon alfa-2a with food. Avoid drinking alcohol as it may make liver disease worse.
- Check with your care team about all other prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements (vitamins, minerals, herbs and others) you are taking before starting this medicine as there are known medicine interactions with peginterferon alfa-2a. Also, check with



your care team before starting any new prescription or over-the-counter medicines, or dietary supplements to make sure that there are no interactions.

When to Call Your Care Team

Call your care team if you have any of these symptoms and/or any new or unusual symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher
- Chills
- Easy bleeding or bruising
- Headache that does not go away
- Blurred vision or other changes in eyesight such as a loss of vision
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Tiredness and/or weakness that interferes with your daily activities
- Severe mood changes such as depression or unusual thoughts and/or behaviors
- Lose interest in your daily activities that you used to enjoy and feeling this way every day, and/or you feel hopelessness
- Thoughts of hurting yourself or others, and suicide
- Hallucinations
- Feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way (palpitations)
- Wheezing and/or trouble breathing
- Dry cough or a cough that is bothersome
- Swelling in your legs or ankles
- Lips or skin turn a bluish color
- Chest pain or symptoms of a heart attack. Most heart attacks involve pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes. The pain may go away and come back or it can be constant. It can feel like pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain. Sometimes pain is felt in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach. **If any of these symptoms last 2 minutes, call 911.**
- Symptoms of a stroke such as sudden numbness or weakness of your face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of your body; sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding; sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes; sudden trouble walking, feeling dizzy, loss of balance or coordination; or sudden bad headache with no known cause. **If you have any of these symptoms for 2 minutes, call 911.**
- Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking and/or is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Throwing up more than 3 times a day
- Diarrhea, 4 times in one day or diarrhea with lack of strength or a feeling of being dizzy
- Pain in your abdomen that does not go away and/or severe pain in your abdomen that may spread to your back
- Blood in your stool (bright red, or black/tarry)
- Flu-like symptoms: fever, headache, muscle and joint aches, and tiredness
- Numbness, tingling, or pain in your hands and feet
- Abnormal blood sugar



- Signs of high blood sugar: unusual thirst, passing urine often, headache, sweating, shakiness, irritability
- Signs of low blood sugar: feeling sleepy, increased hunger, sweating, shakiness, irritability
- Signs of low thyroid function: tiredness, unexplained weight gain, hair loss, dry skin, constipation, increased sensitivity to cold
- Signs of increased thyroid function: unexplained weight loss, sweating, irritability, feeling that your heart is beating fast or in a not normal way (palpitations)
- Signs of infection: fever or chills, cough, trouble breathing, severe pain in your abdomen, trouble urinating, burning or pain when you pass urine, redness and/or swelling of the skin
- Signs of allergic reaction: swelling of the face, feeling like your tongue or throat are swelling, trouble breathing, rash, itching, fever, chills, feeling dizzy, and/or feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way. **If this happens, call 911 for emergency care.**
- Signs of possible liver problems: dark urine, pale bowel movements, bad stomach pain, feeling very tired and weak, unusual itching, or yellowing of the eyes or skin

Reproduction Warnings

- **Pregnancy warning:** This medicine can cause serious birth defects. If you can become pregnant, use birth control while taking this medicine. Tell your care team right away if you think you might be pregnant.
- **Breastfeeding warning:** Talk with your care team about breastfeeding during treatment. You may need to stop breastfeeding.
- **Fertility warning:** This medicine may affect your ability to have children in the future. If you plan to have children, talk with your care team.

Revised December 2025

