

Treating Arthritis

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Main Messages:

- Treat early!
- Treat aggressively!
- Drugs important, but only one aspect of therapy!

Plan of Talk

- A. ANTI-INFLAMMATORY Agents
- B. Role of STEROIDS
- C. DMARDs (Disease Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs)
- D. BIOLOGICAL AGENTS eg anti-TNF
- E. SURGERY

Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs

e.g Nurofen, Diclofenac, Lodine

- Improve symptoms
- ↓ early morning stiffness
- **BUT** risk of stomach upset/ulcers
- Can ↑ blood pressure/damage kidneys
- Don't prevent joint damage

Role of Steroids

- **Prednisolone tablets**

Effective ++, but late side effects

Use if: 1) Severe RA 2) Unwell +++

- **Intra-muscular depo-medrone**

Use at: 1) Start DMARD 2) Acute 'flares'

- **Into joints**

Use if: 1 or 2 joints inflamed

Disease Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs (DMARDs)

- Use **early** to ↓ joint damage
- **SULPHASALAZINE** and / or **METHOTREXATE**
- Benefits in 6-8 weeks
- Good safety, but must monitor

Initial DMARDs

SULPHASALAZINE

- Does not suppress immune system
- Safest effective drug
- Side effects rare

METHOTREXATE

- 'Gold Standard' drug
- Suppresses immune system
- Taken one day per week (**tablets/injection**)

Subsequent DMARDs

LEFLUNOMIDE (ARAVA)

- Newest oral agent
- Effective in some who fail above drugs
- More side effects esp. diarrhoea
- Reduces joint damage
- Effective **with Methotrexate**

Anti-TNF Drugs (e.g. Infliximab, Enbrel, Humira)

- Effective +++, but must be injected
- Use once failed on 2 DMARDs (including methotrexate)
- Better with methotrexate on board
- Stops joint damage

- **BUT:** Rare serious infections/side effects
Expensive (> £9,000/year)

Other Biological Agents (eg Mabthera)

- Target other molecules in inflamed joints
- Use where TNF Drugs failed
- Stop joint damage effectively
- Can be used every 6-9 months
- Less expensive
- **BUT** Slower action (3-4 months)

Orthopaedic Surgery

- To improve function in some patients
- **Early Surgery:** Remove lining of joint to reduce damage e.g. wrists/ knees (Rarely needed with better drugs)
- **Late Surgery:** 1) Joint replacement e.g. knees, hips, shoulders, elbows and ankles 2) Hand and foot surgery

Summary

- Treat arthritis early and aggressively
- Benefits of drugs outweigh risks
- Trial several drugs/combinations
- Steroids effective, but side-effects ++
- Biological agents effective +++
- Closer to remission or 'cure'