

# SWITCHING IMMUNOGLOBULIN PRODUCTS – WHAT SHOULD I KNOW? WHAT CAN I DO?

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Having to change immunoglobulin products can be an uncertain time. If your doctor has asked you to change immunoglobulin products, you may feel anxious or concerned.

Here's some information to help guide and support you through this process.

## Immunoglobulin products – a bit of background

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Immunoglobulin products available in Australia are manufactured locally and also imported from overseas to fill demand not met by local supply.

The National Blood Authority (NBA) is responsible for making sure that there are enough immunoglobulin products to meet the needs of Australian patients. To do this, each year the NBA reviews how much immunoglobulin has been used and what it has been used for.

The NBA also considers product quality, safety, security of supply and value for money, as immunoglobulin products are very costly. This may lead to some products being replaced with other products. All immunoglobulin products, whether domestic or imported, must meet the same high standards of safety and effectiveness.

## Why you may be asked to switch your immunoglobulin product to a different one

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You may be asked to switch to a different immunoglobulin product for reasons such as:

- ▶ a product has been recalled or is no longer available from the manufacturer
- ▶ a product has been replaced by the manufacturer with a product that is slightly different
- ▶ there has been a change to the national buying and distribution arrangements. These change from time-to-time to ensure there are enough immunoglobulin products available to meet demand.

Availability of different immunoglobulin products also varies between hospitals or clinics.

## Are all immunoglobulin products the same?

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All immunoglobulin products contain the same **active ingredient** – immunoglobulin G (IgG). This is a type of protein that fights infections and diseases – it's the key ingredient that is responsible for the effectiveness of immunoglobulin products.

However, the *concentration* of IgG differs between products. More concentrated products can be useful when higher doses are needed.

Products also differ in their **other ingredients**, such as sodium, sugars and amino acids, and have different manufacturing processes. These differences don't alter effectiveness but they can mean that some people react differently to the product, and may experience side effects.

Your doctor will choose a product that is right for you. For example, if you have diabetes, your doctor may prescribe a product that doesn't contain sugar.

## What side effects might be experienced when switching?

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The side effects from switching products are the same as those that can happen when you first start a product.

If you are using an intravenous immunoglobulin product, these can include symptoms such as headache, tiredness or body pain. These are more likely to happen with the first few treatments but get better over time.

If you are using a subcutaneous immunoglobulin product, you may also experience these side effects, but they are less common.

Very rarely, more serious side effects, such as allergic reactions or blood clots, can occur with either intravenous or subcutaneous products.

**Side effects from product switching are actually quite uncommon. Some people find that they have fewer side effects when they switch products.**

## Is switching products compulsory? Can I go back to my former product if I prefer it?

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You may have to switch products if the one you have been using is no longer available. Your doctor will discuss your options to minimise the impact on your treatment.

If the product you were using becomes available again, you can discuss switching back with your doctor.

## How will switching be managed?

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Your doctor will discuss the product change with you, and how it may affect your treatment. They will also address any issues or questions you might have.

To make sure that you can tolerate the new product and to allow any side effects that might happen to be monitored and addressed promptly, you may be asked to attend a hospital for your first treatment, even if this is not your usual routine.

Before your appointment you should speak to your doctor or health professional about how a new product could change your treatment – for example, the new product might change the amount of time you need to spend at the hospital. Ask how long your infusion will take so that you can plan your time.

Discuss any immunoglobulin side effects you have had before. Many side effects from intravenous immunoglobulin products can be prevented or reduced by proper product selection and delivery. Tell your treatment team straight away if you start to feel uncomfortable or unwell – steps can be taken to prevent or reduce side effects.

Once you and the treatment team are sure you are tolerating the new product, you will be able to return to your normal pattern of infusions.

If you are using immunoglobulin products at home and are unable to attend a hospital, ask your health professional how they can help you manage the change.

## What else can I do?

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There are several ways to make sure the change to your product go as smoothly as possible:

- ▶ ask your health professional what you can do to prepare, and make sure to report any changes to your health (including medicines) since your last treatment
- ▶ use a treatment diary. Keep a record of any reactions, good or bad, that you have when switching products. This might include changes to pain, fatigue, or activity, and how long the symptoms lasted. Treatment diaries are useful to fill in treatment histories and help your doctor develop a more effective treatment plan
- ▶ know what to do in case of a side effect. Ask your treatment team for a list of common reactions, how to manage them, and when to seek help
- ▶ have a phone contact handy in case you need to call for advice. This could be your treatment team, your specialist, or your GP
- ▶ make an appointment with your doctor for a review of your treatment. Reviews are a good opportunity to discuss your progress and wellbeing.

**Remember – Don't skip doses or change your treatment in any way without talking to your doctor.**

## Want to know more?

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You can find out more about immunoglobulin here:

- ▶ National Blood Authority: Immunoglobulin: [www.blood.gov.au/ig](http://www.blood.gov.au/ig)
  - ▶ National Blood Authority: Patient factsheets and resources [www.blood.gov.au/patient-factsheets-and-resources](http://www.blood.gov.au/patient-factsheets-and-resources)
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### VALUE IN PRESCRIBING PROGRAM – IMMUNOGLOBULIN PRODUCTS

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Increasing the awareness and understanding amongst health professionals of access to immunoglobulin products in Australia, and improving health outcomes for patients through access to better health information to manage their health conditions. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health through the Value in Prescribing Program: Immunoglobulins Products Grant.

