



Infusion Therapy: A Lifeline for Various Medical Conditions

Infusion therapy, a medical treatment that administers medication directly into the bloodstream, is a beacon of hope for many patients. This method bypasses the digestive system, allowing the medication to work more quickly and efficiently. It's particularly beneficial for patients with diseases that don't respond to oral medication or when high drug doses are required quickly.

How is Infusion Therapy Administered?

Infusion therapy is delivered directly into the bloodstream, usually through a needle and catheter inserted into a vein. The process involves an infusion pump that precisely distributes the medication through a catheter into your veins. The duration of the treatment can vary, lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to a couple of hours. A few medications are given by syringe over just a few minutes.

Some infusions, such as iron infusions, are administered several times weekly and often do not need to be repeated. However, most conditions, such as Inflammatory Bowel Disease, require periodic infusions indefinitely to maintain disease control.

Why is Infusion Therapy Performed?

Infusion therapy is often used when a patient's condition does not respond to oral medication or when high drug doses are required quickly. It is particularly beneficial for patients with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, where the medication must bypass the gastrointestinal tract to be effective. The advent of biologics, medicines made from living cells designed to locate and alter the activity of immune system proteins that promote inflammation, has made infusion therapy a more common method of delivering medication. These drugs often narrowly alter immune functioning or inflammation, resulting in fewer unwanted side effects.

For the treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Disease, common infusion medications would be would include:



- **Infliximab (Remicade):** This is a TNF-alpha inhibitor that is given by infusion. It can be used to treat both ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.
- **Adalimumab (Humira):** This is another TNF-alpha inhibitor given by injection. It can also be used to treat both ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.
- **Certolizumab pegol (Cimzia):** This TNF-alpha inhibitor is given by injection and is used to treat Crohn's disease.
- **Golimumab (Simponi):** This is a TNF-alpha inhibitor given by injection and is used to treat ulcerative colitis.
- **Ustekinumab (Stelara):** This is an interleukin inhibitor given initially as a one-time infusion followed by injections at home and is used to treat both ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.
- **Vedolizumab (Entyvio):** This is an integrin receptor antagonist given by infusion and can treat ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.
- **Risankizumab (Skyrizi):** This is an interleukin inhibitor used to treat Crohn's disease that is given by infusion for three doses followed by injections at home.

Biosimilars in Infusion Therapy

You might have heard the term 'biosimilars' when it comes to medical treatments. But what exactly are they? Biosimilars are a type of medication that closely resembles another drug, known as a biologic. Biologics are medicines made in living systems, such as yeast, bacteria, or animal cells. They are used to treat various conditions, including Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease.

Biosimilars are like the younger siblings of biologics. They are not identical but very similar in structure and function. This means they can do the same job in the body as the original biologic drug. The creation of biosimilars has been a significant step forward in healthcare because they often cost less than the original biologics, making treatment more accessible for more people.

Examples of biosimilars commonly used in infusion therapy are Inflectra and Avsola. Inflectra and Avsola are biosimilar to a biologic drug called Remicade. It treats several conditions, including certain types of arthritis, Crohn's disease, and ulcerative colitis. Like other biosimilars, Inflectra and Avsola are administered through an intravenous infusion.

Conditions Treated by Infusion Therapy

Infusion therapy is used to treat a wide range of conditions. These include:

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| Ankylosing Spondylitis | Multiple Sclerosis |
| Arthritis | Myasthenia Gravis |
| Asthma | Osteoporosis |
| Crohn's Disease | Psoriasis |
| Inflammatory Bowel Disease | Rheumatoid Arthritis |
| Iron Deficiency Anemia | Scleroderma |
| Lupus | Ulcerative Colitis |

Our facility specifically treats anemia and Inflammatory Bowel Disease (Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis).

What Preparation is Involved?

Before the treatment begins, your infusion physician will discuss the side effects of your medication and answer any questions you may have. They will also ensure that you are comfortable, providing amenities like blankets and pillows, Wi-Fi, drinks, and recliner chairs.

What are the Risks?

While infusion therapy is generally safe, it does come with some risks. These include potential adverse reactions to the medication, such as shortness of breath, a rash, or a sudden drop in blood pressure. However, these reactions are rare, and because the therapy is administered in a medical setting, nurses or other providers are on hand to monitor and address potential issues.

Biologic therapy can cause an increased potential for infections. Please contact our office and report any cough, cold, or infections before coming in for your infusion.

Insurance Coverage for Infusion Therapy

Iron therapy with Ferrlecit and Venofer are generally affordable. However, treatment with the high-potency iron, Injectafer, and the biologic therapies are costly. Most commercial and public health insurance plans in the U.S. cover infusion therapy, although the level of coverage can vary. Some plans specify which medications they cover, which could limit options for a patient who requires infusion therapy. Any costs not covered by health insurance may become the patient's financial responsibility.

Patient assistance programs are available for uninsured people whose insurance does not cover much of the infusion therapy cost. These programs provide treatments for free or at a reduced cost to patients who qualify based on financial need. Our infusion authorization coordinators work diligently to find financial solutions to help patients afford infusion and injection therapy. In conclusion, infusion therapy is a vital treatment method for various conditions, particularly those that do not respond to oral medication. While it does come with some risks, the benefits often outweigh them, providing relief and improved quality of life for many patients.

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The Center for Digestive Health & Nutrition is a private medical practice comprised of experienced Gastroenterologists, Nurse Practitioners, and staff members dedicated to preventing and treating digestive disorders. Our physicians have been serving the needs of those in Western Pennsylvania and surrounding areas since 1977, having cared for tens of thousands of individuals with digestive problems.

Our mission is to deliver high-quality gastroenterology services efficiently and cost-consciously. We realize the very sensitive nature of GI illness and understand the necessity to provide our services in an environment that stresses patient privacy and confidentiality and where patient satisfaction is the goal. Appointments can be conveniently scheduled online via our website above. Learn more about digestive issues on Instagram @thedigestivetract

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