

Rifaximin for reducing recurrent episodes of overt hepatic encephalopathy

WHAT DOES THE GUIDANCE SAY?

Rifaximin is recommended for listing on the Standard Drug List (SDL) for government subsidy as add-on therapy to lactulose to reduce recurring episodes of overt hepatic encephalopathy.

WHAT IS HEPATIC ENCEPHALOPATHY?

Hepatic encephalopathy is a brain disorder associated with liver disease, that occurs when the liver cannot remove toxins from the blood effectively. Toxins can build up in the bloodstream, affecting brain function (encephalopathy), and cause changes in personality and behaviour, and muscle problems (such as trembling hands).

WHAT IS RIFAXIMIN?

You may know rifaximin as Xifaxan[®], a drug that lowers the body's production of ammonia, one of the toxins that may cause hepatic encephalopathy.

HOW MUCH RIFAXIMIN CAN I TAKE?

Your doctor will usually prescribe you one 550 mg tablet to be taken twice daily with lactulose.

HOW LONG SHOULD I TAKE IT?

Your doctor will advise you on how long you will need to take rifaximin. Treatment may be given for up to six months to reduce your risk of experiencing an episode of overt hepatic encephalopathy.

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WHO CAN HAVE RIFAXIMIN?

People can apply for rifaximin through the SDL if they:

- Have overt hepatic encephalopathy, confirmed with a brain scan or blood tests; and
- Are currently on lactulose but have experienced an episode of hepatic encephalopathy.

Your doctor can advise if rifaximin is suitable for you.

WHY WAS RIFAXIMIN RECOMMENDED FOR SUBSIDY?

ACE evaluates how well a treatment works in relation to how much it costs compared to other treatments. Rifaximin was recommended because its benefit in relieving symptoms and improving quality of life for certain patients who have had a episode of overt hepatic encephalopathy justifies its cost.

WHAT DOES LISTING ON THE SDL MEAN FOR ME?

Drugs on the Standard Drug List (SDL) represent therapies essential for managing common diseases affecting the majority of patients in Singapore.

They are subsidised at 50% for all Singaporean citizens who are treated in a public healthcare institution. Patients from lower to middle income households may receive a higher subsidy of up to 75%.

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ACE is the national health technology assessment agency under the Ministry of Health, Singapore. It publishes guidances on diagnosing, treating, and preventing different medical conditions based on the latest research information available worldwide.

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