

## Ursodeoxycholic acid for treating primary biliary cirrhosis

### WHAT DOES THE GUIDANCE SAY?

Ursodeoxycholic acid is recommended for listing on the Standard Drug List (SDL) for government subsidy for people with primary biliary cirrhosis who do not have decompensated cirrhosis.

### WHAT IS PRIMARY BILIARY CIRRHOSIS (PBC)?

PBC, also known as primary biliary cirrhosis or primary biliary cholangitis, is a chronic auto-immune condition which affects the liver. In patients with PBC, the body identifies bile ducts (which allow the flow of bile from the liver) as foreign objects and tries to destroy them. As a result, bile acid builds up in the liver and damages surrounding cells, causing inflammation and scarring (cirrhosis).

### WHAT IS URSODEOXYCHOLIC ACID?

You may know ursodeoxycholic acid as Ursofalk<sup>®</sup>, a naturally occurring bile acid. It is used to treat PBC by increasing bile flow and improving liver function.

### HOW MUCH URSODEOXYCHOLIC ACID CAN I TAKE?

Your doctor may prescribe ursodeoxycholic acid in the form of either 250 mg capsules or 500 mg tablets, to be taken up to three times a day. An oral suspension (liquid) is also available for some patients who may have difficulty swallowing a tablet or capsule. The number of capsules or tablets, or the amount of suspension that you need to take depends on your body weight.

### HOW LONG SHOULD I TAKE IT?

Your doctor will advise you on how long you will need to take ursodeoxycholic acid. Treatment is typically lifelong, unless you receive a liver transplant or your condition is considered to have gone into remission.

## Ursodeoxycholic acid for treating primary biliary cirrhosis

### WHO CAN HAVE URSODEOXYCHOLIC ACID?

People can take ursodeoxycholic acid if they:

- Have PBC, confirmed by laboratory tests; and
- Do not have decompensated hepatic cirrhosis.

Your doctor will advise if ursodeoxycholic acid is a suitable treatment for you.

The liquid form of ursodeoxycholic acid, which is usually prescribed to children, has not been reviewed for efficacy, safety and quality by Singapore's regulatory agency, the Health Sciences Authority (HSA). Please discuss with your doctor if this preparation is suitable before starting treatment.

### WHY WAS IT RECOMMENDED FOR SUBSIDY?

ACE evaluates how well a treatment works in relation to how much it costs compared to other treatments. Ursodeoxycholic acid was recommended for subsidy because its benefit in improving liver function and reducing the need for liver transplantation for certain patients with PBC 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%.

Updated: 1 September 2020

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.

This summary is not, and should not be regarded as, a substitute for professional or medical advice. Please seek the advice of a qualified healthcare professional about any medical condition.

*To find out more about ACE visit [www.ace-hta.gov.sg](http://www.ace-hta.gov.sg)*