

# Difelikefalin therapy

## What is difelikefalin?

Difelikefalin is a medication used to reduce chronic kidney disease associated pruritis (itching) or CKD-aP in patients who are on haemodialysis. It is also known as Kapruvia, or DFK. Difelikefalin is given at the end of dialysis sessions.

## Who is prescribed difelikefalin?

People who experience moderate to severe itching, despite already receiving the current best care, may be suitable for difelikefalin. Care options that we try first include optimising dialysis sessions, using emollients and medications, such as antihistamines or other anti-itching therapies. Difelikefalin is only available to patients receiving haemodialysis at dialysis centres.

## How does it work?

Difelikefalin prevents itching signals from reaching the brain by activating kappa opioid receptors (KORs) in your body. KORs have long been known to be involved with the itching sensation.

## What do I need to know before I start taking difelikefalin?

You will need to complete two questionnaires as part of the application process for difelikefalin. These are the **Worst Itch Numerical Rating Scale (WI-NRS)** and the **5-D Pruritis Scale**. If approved, these questionnaires will be repeated at 12 weeks to assess response to difelikefalin. If there is no improvement in symptoms, then difelikefalin will be discontinued.

## How do I take it?

Difelikefalin is given at the end of haemodialysis sessions by adding it to the blood returning to the body. It should not be given any more than four times per week, even if you have more than four dialysis sessions per week. If you are receiving any other medications by this method, these will need to be given one after another and not given at the same time. If you finish a dialysis session in less than an hour for any reason, difelikefalin will not need to be given as the previous dose will not have been completely removed.

## Do I need any special checks while on difelikefalin?

Most of the tests required to monitor difelikefalin are already routinely part of haemodialysis monitoring. However, it is important that we assess your itching scores at regular intervals to ensure difelikefalin is working as it should be.

## Can difelikefalin cause side effects?

All medicines can cause unwanted side effects. As difelikefalin is a relatively new medication, all side effects must be reported to the relevant medicines' regulatory authority. Please inform your dialysis team or your renal pharmacy team if you suspect you are experiencing any side effects from difelikefalin.

Some side effects have already been reported from patients taking difelikefalin:

- Common ( $\geq 1/100$ ): drowsiness, paraesthesia (sometimes known as pins and needles)
- Uncommon ( $\geq 1/1,000$ ): dizziness, headache, nausea, diarrhoea

These should not be serious, but you should still let us know if you suspect you are experiencing any of these side effects.

## Does difelikefalin interfere with my other medicines?

Difelikefalin is not currently known to interfere with any other medications, however, it is good practice to ask your pharmacist whenever you start a new medication so that up-to-date advice can be given.

As difelikefalin can cause drowsiness, if you are taking any other medications which can cause drowsiness (sedating antihistamines, gabapentin or pregabalin, opioid painkillers etc), taking difelikefalin may increase the likelihood of this occurring.

## Useful contact details

### East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust:

- Website [www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk)
- Telephone 01438 314333

### Renal Pharmacists:

- Telephone 01438 284677
- Email - [renalpharmacists.enh-tr@nhs.net](mailto:renalpharmacists.enh-tr@nhs.net)

### Medicines information:

- Telephone 01438 286150
- Email - [medinfo.enhtr@nhs.net](mailto:medinfo.enhtr@nhs.net)

## Leaflet information

**You can request this information in a different format or another language; please speak to your doctor or nurse.**

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