

Myasthenia gravis management advice

What is myasthenia gravis?

More info: <https://www.myaware.org>

Your nerves send signals to make your muscles work. This includes the muscles that move your eyes, lift your eyelids, help you chew and swallow, help you breathe and move your body.

To do this, nerves release a chemical signal (acetylcholine) at the junction with a muscle. In myasthenia gravis (which means 'serious muscle weakness'), your immune system wrongly makes an antibody that destroys the acetylcholine sensor on muscles. This means muscles do not know that they need to work.

Treatments can help by stopping the immune system making the antibody (like steroids or azathioprine) or by making more of the signal available at the muscle junction (like pyridostigmine). Steroids may severely worsen myasthenia gravis in the first 1-2 weeks.

Healthcare and drugs to avoid

More info: <https://www.myaware.org/drugs-to-avoid>

Inform any doctor, surgeon, anaesthetist or dentist about the condition so they know not to use drugs that can worsen myasthenia gravis.

The commonest drugs to avoid end in -olol (beta-blockers), -mycin (antibiotics), -cycline (antibiotics).

Some others are amikacin, Botox, ciprofloxacin, lithium, magnesium, phenytoin, prochlorperazine, quinine.

For surgery, an anaesthetist should make sure that you have your usual medications by mouth or in a vein on the day of surgery.

Emergency and myasthenic crisis

One in five people with myasthenia gravis will suffer a myasthenic crisis which is severe weakness of the breathing muscles. This can be life-threatening. It is a risk even in people with very mild disease or disease that only affected the eyes before.

Triggers for worsening are: Infections, surgery, stress, extreme temperatures, wrong drugs.

Medical bracelet

It may be a good idea to wear a medical bracelet or carry information in your purse/wallet about myasthenia gravis in case of an emergency. This is to avoid dangerous drugs and ensure the correct emergency treatment can be given.

Driving

More info: <https://www.gov.uk/myasthenia-gravis-and-driving>

In the UK, anyone with myasthenia gravis must inform the DVLA. They will ask about medicines, vision and doctor's details. They may do a medical assessment.