Safely Eliminate a Biologic

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How to Safely Eliminate a Biologic from your RA Treatment Plan

It can be tempting to simply abandon your biologic once your RA goes into remission, but there is a chance that sudden elimination can bring on a flare up. Fortunately, recent research into RA treatments promises more personalized approaches to a safe, comfortable and effective course of medication. In some cases, eliminating a biologic drug can actually help patients enjoy more healing benefits for years to come, as a recent study has shown.

Risks of Stopping a Biologic for Rheumatoid Arthritis

Recent studies have shown that people with established rheumatoid arthritis could have a more severe response when they abruptly stop a biologic, while those in early stages of the disease might not experience any adverse effects at all. One problem with biologics is that they work a little differently for everyone, and just as it's impossible to predict which side effects you may experience when you begin to take a drug like adalimumab (Humira), it's likewise difficult to predict how your body will respond when you take that drug away.

The Benefits to Changing your Medication

If you're able to safely eliminate your biologic, you can expect fewer complications and more lifestyle improvements, like:

- **Savings.** Biologics are expensive, so you can count on saving a good deal of money if you can eliminate the drug.
- **Comfort.** Biologics bring side effects like hives and urinary tract infections and will suppress your immune system.
- **Stress Relief.** One less drug means a simpler treatment plan, less limitation on diet and activity, and better control over your appointments and schedule.

The key to all of these benefits is a well-timed approach and close monitoring. A major study has returned some positive results for patients with early rheumatoid arthritis that had been taking a combination of methotrexate and Humira for six months. After they were taken off the biologic, they were monitored for one year, and most of those patients continued to fare well, with no adverse effects on joint health, range of motion or disease control.

Determining if the Time is Right

Doctors are optimistic that most patients can safely and effectively stop their biologic after it has improved symptoms and slowed disease progression. In fact, the evidence suggests that although the drug completely leaves the system in about two weeks, it can have lasting effects on the destructive inflammatory response that characterizes RA – you can continue to enjoy the healing benefits without continuing the medication.

However, not every patient is expected to react well to the elimination. The most recent study focused only on patients in the early stages of RA, so if you've been living with the disease for years, you are probably at a greater risk of experiencing negative effects. Talk with your doctor about how your body might be affected with a change in treatment, and be sure to follow their recommendations for your specific case.