



tPA Patient Information Sheet

What is tPA?

tPA is a medication that dissolves blood clots. It is called a thrombolytic agent or more commonly referred to as a "clot buster." It is a medication given through an IV.

What type of stroke is IV tPA used for?

tPA is used to treat ischemic strokes. About 8 out of 10 brain attacks (strokes) are ischemic. These types of strokes are most often caused by blood clots that block the flow of blood to the brain causing tissue death. tPA is given to help dissolve the clot quickly and restore the blood flow to the brain tissue. The other common type of brain attack is called a hemorrhagic stroke. This brain attack (stroke) is due to bleeding from a blood vessel into the brain. tPA is not used with this type of brain attack because it could increase the amount of bleeding and possibly cause more damage to the brain. A CT scan or MRI of the head is done to confirm there is no bleeding in the brain before tPA is given.

When is tPA used?

tPA has been approved to treat strokes in the first three hours following the onset of symptoms. If given promptly, 1 in 3 patients who receive tPA resolve their symptoms or have major improvement in their stroke symptoms, over the course of three months. A recent large study showed that tPA remained beneficial even when it was given between 3 and 4.5 hours; in that study, 1 in 14 patients who received tPA resolved their symptoms fully.

What are the risks of tPA?

Bleeding (hemorrhage), in the brain or in other parts of the body, is the most common risk that can occur. In 6 out of 100 patients treated within 3 hours, bleeding may occur into the brain and cause further injury. For 1 of these 6 patients it may cause death or long term serious disability. This risk was similar for patients who received tPA between 3 to 4.5 hours.

Should everyone receive tPA therapy?

Unfortunately the answer is no. Persons who cannot be treated within 4.5 hours of their first symptom, patients with certain medical conditions, and patients with certain types of strokes will not qualify for this treatment.

Inform your physician if you have had any of the following:

- Recent heart attack
- Serious head trauma within the last three months
- Bleeding from the stomach or urinary tract within the last 21 days
- Major surgery within previous 14 days
- Bleeding disorders
- Use of blood thinners, such as warfarin, Xarelto, Eliquis, and other anticoagulants
- Pregnancy
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure

Adapted from www.giveme5forstroke.com tPA information sheet

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