



## Rx Focus

### Treatment of Itchy Eyes due to Allergies

Seasonal allergic conjunctivitis is triggered by direct exposure to pollens (grass, tree and weed) and to molds. Symptoms include red, itchy eyes, tearing, swollen eyelids and foreign body sensation. It is the most common form of allergic eye disease. (Perennial allergic conjunctivitis occurs year round and is caused by exposure to such allergens as dust mites, animal dander and feathers.)

The initial and least expensive line of treatment for allergic conjunctivitis is the use of OTC antihistamine-decongestant

eye drops (e.g., Naphcon-A, Opcon-A, and Visine-A OTC). They work fast and require administration four times a day. These products should not be used for more than 3 days and are contraindicated in patients with heart disease, high blood pressure, glaucoma and enlarged prostate.

The next line of therapy includes the use of prescription antihistamine (Emadine, Livostin) and/or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory (Acular) eye drops. These agents act quickly and can be used long-term if necessary. Dosing of up to four times a day is required.

Mast Cell Stabilizer eye drops (Alamast, Alocril, Alomide and Crolom) are generally administered throughout the allergy season to prevent symptoms. They are not quick acting – therapeutic response is delayed. Depending upon the product, dosing is anywhere from 2 to 6 times a day.

Combination antihistamine/mast cell stabilizing products (Elestat, Optivar, Patanol and Zaditor) are popular because of their dual mechanism of action; however, they are expensive. They are used for the treatment and prevention of symptoms and are generally dosed twice a day.

The use of corticosteroid eye drops should be reserved to treat acute symptoms of the more severe forms of allergic conjunctivitis. (Consultation with an ophthalmologist is recommended.) These products are indicated for short-term use only (two to three weeks).

Oral antihistamines are recommended for patients with additional symptoms such as runny nose. These products work best when given prior to allergen exposure.

Allergy shots are helpful for some individuals with allergic conjunctivitis; however, the shots must be given repeatedly over a long period of time in order to reduce symptoms.

Note that a good non-drug treatment for itchy eyes is the use of cold compresses.

#### References:

1. "Ophthalmic Medications for Allergic Conjunctivitis" and Elestat (Epinastine) Ophthalmic Solution" by Ellen Whipple Guthrie, Pharm.D., *Pharmacist's Letter, Detail-Document #200313, March 2004*

### May Health Observances

**Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month** – sponsored by Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America ([www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org))

**Hepatitis Awareness Month** – sponsored by Hepatitis Foundation International ([www.hepatitisfoundation.org](http://www.hepatitisfoundation.org))

**National High Blood Pressure Education Month** – sponsored by National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Health Information ([www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov))

**National Stroke Awareness Month** – sponsored by National Stroke Association ([www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org))

**Mental Health Month** – sponsored by National Mental Health Association and National Council for Community Behavioral ([www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org))

**Skin Cancer Awareness Month** – sponsored by American Cancer Society ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org))

**National Osteoporosis Awareness and Prevention Month** – sponsored by National Osteoporosis Foundation ([www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org))



## Industry Report

### New Risk Information added to Zelnorm Labeling

Zelnorm (tegaserod maleate), manufactured by Novartis Pharmaceuticals, is used for the short-term treatment of irritable bowel syndrome in women whose primary symptom is constipation. It increases the movement of stools through the bowels and reduces pain in the abdominal area, bloating and constipation. It was approved by the FDA on July 24, 2002.

On April 28, 2004, the FDA announced the addition of new risk information to the professional labeling for Zelnorm. This information includes:

- A new warning regarding the serious consequences of diarrhea associated with Zelnorm use. Some patients have required hospitalization for rehydration. (Patients are advised to stop taking Zelnorm and to call a doctor immediately if they experience diarrhea leading to lightheadedness, dizziness or fainting.)
- A new precaution about ischemic colitis and other disorders resulting from reduced blood flow to the intestines. Patients who develop symptoms of ischemic colitis such as rectal bleeding, bloody diarrhea and/or new or worsening abdominal pain should discontinue Zelnorm immediately and contact a doctor for evaluation.

CBCA Rx requires medical necessity review for Zelnorm use on all active plans. If authorization is granted, initial approval is for a period of 3 months. (Per FDA guidelines, Zelnorm is not approved for use in men or children 18 years of age and younger.)



## New Drug Approvals

### Apidra®

Approved 4/19/04

*Chemical Name:* Insulin Glulisine [rDNA origin] Injection

*Manufacturer:* Aventis

*Therapeutic Class:* Anti-diabetes Treatment

*Approved Indications:* Treatment of type 1 and type 2 diabetes to cover mealtime blood sugar spikes.

*Average Wholesale Price:* Not known at this time

*Special Notes:* Apidra is intended to be given either by subcutaneous injection or by continuous subcutaneous pump infusion.

### Hylaform® Gel

Approved 4/23/2004

*Chemical Name:* Hylan-B Gel

*Manufacturer:* Inamed Corp. and Genzyme Corp.

*Therapeutic Class:* Cosmetic Agent

*Approved Indication:* Injection into the mid to deep dermis for correction of moderate to severe facial wrinkles and folds.

*Other Medications in Class:* Cosmoderm®/Cosmoplast®; Zyderm®/Zyplast®

*Special Notes:* Injectable intended for cosmetic use, therefore not covered on CBCA Rx plans



## New Generic Approvals

### Mirtazapine 7.5mg, 15mg, 30mg and 45mg Tablets

Approved 4/23/04

*Brand Name Equivalent:* Remeron

*Approved Indication:* Treatment of major depressive disorders.

*Manufacturer:* Caraco Pharmaceutical Laboratories, Ltd.

### Ribasphere 200mg Capsules

Approved 4/7/2004

*Brand Name Equivalent:* Rebetol

*Approved Indication:* To be used in combination with interferon alfa-2b for the treatment of Hepatitis C.

*Manufacturer:* Three Rivers Pharmaceuticals, LLC

### Terconazole Vaginal Cream, 0.8%

Approved 4/7/2004

*Brand Name Equivalent:* Terazol® 3 Vaginal Cream 0.8%

*Approved Indication:* Treatment of vaginal yeast infections.

*Manufacturer:* Taro Pharmaceutical Industries, Ltd.



CBCA Rx  
675 Foxon Road, Suite 204  
East Haven CT 06513  
Phone: (800) 936-1193  
Fax: (203) 468-8416