

Biosimilar medicines

Information for patients



This leaflet explains what biological and (biosimilar) medicines are and what they are used to treat. It also explains why you are being switched to a biosimilar medicine or between different brands of biosimilar drugs and how we ensure your treatment remains safe and effective. If you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the team caring for you.

What are biological medicines?

Unlike regular medicines that are made from chemicals, biological medicines are more complex. They are made from natural sources, such as living cells, and they contain larger and more complicated building blocks.

They are produced using highly controlled manufacturing processes to ensure they meet strict quality and safety standards.

Biological medicines are used to treat a range of long-term conditions, including:

- rheumatoid arthritis
- wet age-related macular degeneration (AMD)
- diabetic macular oedema (DMO)
- psoriasis
- Crohn's disease
- ulcerative colitis
- some types of cancer
- diabetes (e.g. insulin)

Because biological medicines are so complex, it is not possible to make exact copies of them. But very similar versions – known as biosimilar medicines – are developed and fully assessed to ensure they work just as safely and effectively.

What are biosimilar medicines?

When a company develops a biological medicine it is granted rights, known as a patent, that prevent anyone else from making, using or selling the drug without its permission. This patent lasts for a set time. Once the patent on the biological medicine (known as the 'originator') runs out, other manufacturers can produce highly similar versions called **biosimilar medicines**.



Biosimilar medicines:

- are made to the **same high standards of safety and quality**
- are approved by UK regulators such as the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)
- are thoroughly tested to ensure they are as safe and effective as the original biological medicine
- have been used safely in the NHS for more than 15 years. An example of this is a medicine called somatropin, which is used to treat growth deficiency.

Although there may be very small differences, such as the type of packaging or the device used, biosimilar medicines work in the same way and treat the same conditions.

You will also see different brand names on the packaging because there are often several approved biosimilar brands of the same biological medicine. The NHS regularly reviews its contracts with the companies that produce them and may choose a different brand if it offers better value.

Why does the NHS use biosimilar medicines?

Biosimilar medicines:

- **provide the same clinical benefit** and work as well as the originator medicine
- are better value for the NHS as they are cheaper to develop because the patent on the originator medicine has run out
- allow more patients to be treated while maintaining the same high standards of care
- enable the NHS to make the best use of its resources while ensuring the same level of safety and quality.

Is it safe to switch to a biosimilar medicine?

Yes. NHS patients are routinely switched to biosimilar medicines and many

have switched safely. Your treatment will continue to be closely monitored and you will be fully supported as you move to the biosimilar medicine.

Is it safe to switch between different brands of biosimilar medicines?

Yes. NHS patients are routinely switched between different brands of biosimilar medicines and many have switched safely. Your treatment will continue to be closely monitored and you will be fully supported as you move to the new brand of biosimilar medicine.

What does this mean for me?

You may be prescribed a biosimilar medicine when you start treatment, or you may be switched to a different brand during your care.

Regardless of the brand, your medicine will remain safe, effective and of the highest quality.

What should I expect if my medicine brand changes?

If your medicine is switched to a different biosimilar brand, you may notice:

- A **different brand name and/or packaging** on your medication
- A **different injection device**

The medicine itself will still be safe, effective and closely monitored.

Will you tell me if my biosimilar medicine or brand is being switched?

Yes. We will tell you if your medicine is changing, either by an electronic letter on your MyChart app or a physical letter in the post.

Your specialist team will:

- explain any differences, such as the name of the medicine or the injection device

- answer any questions or concerns you may have

What if I have side effects after switching?

Biosimilar medicines are no more likely to cause side effects than the original biological medicine. But if you feel unwell or notice anything unusual:

- contact your specialist team
- let your GP know

Your specialist team will support you and adjust your treatment if needed.

We are here for you

We understand that starting or changing a medicine can feel overwhelming. Please remember:

- you are not alone – many patients across the NHS are treated safely with biosimilar medicines
- your safety and wellbeing are our top priorities
- we are here to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Who can I contact with queries or concerns?

Email: **kch-tr.biosimilar-switch@nhs.net**

Tel: **020 3299 9668**

MyChart

Our MyChart app and website lets you securely access parts of your health record with us, giving you more control over your care. To sign up or for help, call us on 020 3299 4618 or email **kings. mychart@nhs.net**. Visit **www.kch.nhs.uk/mychart** to find out more.

Sharing your information

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has partnered with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust through the King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas' hospitals. King's College Hospital and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trusts share an electronic patient record system, which means information about your health record can be accessed safely and securely by health and care staff at both Trusts. For more information, visit www.kch.nhs.uk.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

Tel: **020 3299 4618**

Email: **kings.pals@nhs.net**

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Interpreting and Accessible Communication Support on 020 3299 4618 or email kings.access@nhs.net