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Colchicine

Colchicine is a very old drug and is made from the Autumn Crocus, *Colchicum autumnale* (a poisonous European flowering plant). It has been primarily used in the treatment of gout. Although it is not formally indicated or approved for the treatment of dermatological diseases, colchicine has been prescribed for some skin conditions with good results. Its effectiveness is due to several immunological and anti-inflammatory properties.

In New Zealand colchicine is available as 0.5mg tablets (previously 0.6mg).

Colchicine for dermatological diseases

Colchicine in varying dosages is used for a number of dermatological diseases. Its effectiveness has only been shown through the treatment of small and mostly uncontrolled study groups.

Disease	Dosage	Effectiveness
Amyloidosis	1– 2mg/day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevents amyloid deposition and slows disease progression Appears to increase life expectancy in patients with primary amyloidosis
Behcet disease	1– 1.5mg/day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Response rates of 60–70% have been achieved Orogenital and ocular lesions are the most responsive
Psoriasis	0.5– 3mg/day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the first skin diseases to be treated with colchicine Response better in patients with small papules and plaques Shown effectiveness in treating generalised pustular psoriasis, palmoplantar pustulosis, and psoriatic arthritis
Sweet disease	0.5– 1.5mg/day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement in condition after 2–5 days of colchicine 1.5mg daily
Recurrent aphthous ulcers	1.5– 1.8mg/day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.6mg three times daily has shown to decrease the pain and mean ulcer count

Other dermatological conditions that may be treated with colchicine include [linear IgA dermatosis](#), [acquired epidermolysis bullosa](#), [vasculitis](#), [morphoea](#) and [dermatomyositis](#).

More controlled and double-blind studies are needed to prove the usefulness of colchicine in dermatological diseases.

Contraindications

Colchicine should not be used under the following circumstances:

- Patients with a known hypersensitivity (allergy) to the medicine
- Patients with serious gastrointestinal, kidney, liver or heart disorders
- Patients with blood diseases in which there are low numbers of white cells or platelets

Precautions

Colchicine can be fatal in overdose. Treatment with colchicine should be stopped immediately when abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea or vomiting occur. These are the first signs of toxicity and usually occur between 0–24 hours after taking the medicine.

Side Effects

The most common side effects are abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea or vomiting, which occur in up to 80% of patients receiving a maximal dose. Gastrointestinal symptoms are worse at higher dosages. These symptoms are a good indication that toxicity is approaching and the medicine should be stopped.

Other side effects include:

- Bone marrow depression resulting in agranulocytosis (absent white blood cells) and thrombocytopenia (low numbers of platelets)
- Peripheral neuritis (nerve inflammation affecting hands and feet)
- [Purpura](#) (bleeding into the skin)
- Myopathy (weak muscles)
- Loss of hair
- Azoospermia (absent sperm production).

Colchicine, when used in low doses, has a low rate of side effects. Beneficial effects without the side effects is possible by reducing the dosage.

Related information

References:

- Book: Textbook of Dermatology. Ed Rook A, Wilkinson DS, Ebling FJB, Champion RH, Burton JL. Fourth edition. Blackwell Scientific Publications.
- Sullivan TP, King LE, Boyd AS. Colchicine in dermatology. Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology 1998;39: 993–9. [Medline](#).

On DermNet NZ:

Other websites:

- [Colchicine](#): Medsafe information about medicines
- [Colchicine: Lower doses for greater safety](#): Medsafe

Books about skin diseases:

See the [DermNet NZ bookstore](#)

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DermNet does not provide an on-line consultation service.

If you have any concerns with your skin or its treatment, see a [dermatologist](#) for advice.

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