

# Aminosalicylates - Medication Information

## What are aminosalicylates?

Aminosalicylates are a class of medication that contain 5-aminosalicylic acid (5-ASA). They reduce inflammation in the colon and small intestine without slowing down the immune system. They are effective in treating and keeping mild to moderate ulcerative colitis symptoms under control. They can also be effective in treating Crohn's disease symptoms for a small number of patients.

They are available as:

- mesalamine (brand names: Asacol<sup>®</sup>, Lialda<sup>®</sup>, Apriso<sup>®</sup>, Pentasa<sup>®</sup>, Canasa<sup>®</sup>, Delzicol<sup>®</sup>, Rowasa<sup>®</sup>)
- balsalazide (brand name: Colazal<sup>®</sup>)
- sulfasalazine (brand name: Azulfidine<sup>®</sup>)

## How are aminosalicylates given?

Aminosalicylates usually come as a tablet, or pill, taken by mouth 1-2 times a day. Often, you may need to take more than 1 pill to get the right dose.

Aminosalicylates also come as a suppository or enema given rectally. Suppositories and enemas are helpful for patients who have inflammation in the lower part of the colon.

## When can I expect aminosalicylates to work?

Aminosalicylates work well for most patients with mild ulcerative colitis. They may feel an improvement in symptoms within 4 weeks of starting the medication. Often sooner. Sometimes, aminosalicylates need to be combined with other medications like a corticosteroid, or given as a combination of both oral and rectal aminosalicylates in order for it to work.

How well aminosalicylates work for patients with Crohn's disease is unknown. It may not work at all for many patients. For some patients with mild Crohn's disease, they may find it helpful.

## What tests are needed while I am on aminosalicylates?

There is a rare chance that aminosalicylates can cause kidney problems. For that reason, blood tests and sometimes urine tests to check your kidney function should be done at least every 2 years.

## What are the potential side effects of aminosalicylates?

Side effects with aminosalicylates are uncommon, but may include:

**Mesalamine:** The most common side effects with mesalamine are stomach pain, constipation, and burping.

**Sulfasalazine:** Sulfasalazine makes your body low in folic acid levels. For this reason, you need to take a prescription 1 mg folic acid supplement every day while on sulfasalazine.

The most common side effects with sulfasalazine are skin rash, decreased appetite, headache, and stomach pain. Some patients (fewer than 4 in 100) may experience worsened diarrhea and bleeding within the first month. If you experience this, please stop the medication and contact your provider.

Rarely (fewer than 1 in 1,000) patients on sulfasalazine may experience an allergic reaction in the kidney called interstitial nephritis. If this occurs, it goes away when you stop taking the medication. Other rare side effects include pancreatitis or pericarditis.

Please see the medication package insert for the full list of potential side effects.

## **Are aminosaliclates safe during pregnancy and breastfeeding?**

Aminosaliclates are generally safe during pregnancy and breastfeeding. They have not been linked to birth defects or preterm births. If using aminosaliclates while breastfeeding, monitor your baby for any changes in bowel patterns. They have been shown to cause diarrhea.

In some studies, men on aminosaliclates has been associated with lowered sperm count or lowered sperm motility (sperm moves slower).

## **How can I take care of my health while on aminosaliclates?**

It is important to be up to date with your health maintenance while on aminosaliclates. This includes being current on all the recommended vaccines such as annual flu, updated COVID-19, pneumococcal, and shingles when appropriate. As aminosaliclates are not immunosuppressive medications, it is safe to get live or killed vaccines while on this medication as long as you are not starting any immunosuppressive medications in the next 3 months.

It is also important to be up to date in your general cancer screening including mammograms and pap smears for women, and skin check-ups for both men and women.

Speak to your primary care doctor about whether you are up-to-date on all your vaccines and cancer screening.

## **What if I need help paying for aminosaliclates?**

There are a number of patient assistance programs available through the manufacturers of aminosaliclates. We recommend going to the manufacturer's website for your specific medication to see if there are patient assistance programs available.

You may also check for coupons and discounts available online such as:

- [www.goodrx.com](http://www.goodrx.com)
- [www.prescriptionhope.com](http://www.prescriptionhope.com)
- [costplusdrugs.com](http://costplusdrugs.com)
- [www.needymeds.org](http://www.needymeds.org)

## **What if I have questions about aminosaliclates?**

Talk with your provider about any questions or concerns you may have about aminosaliclates.

This document has been reviewed for plain language by Blum Center staff.

