

STELARA (USTEKINUMAB)

Stelara (Ustekinumab) is a promising new treatment for psoriasis. The FDA approved Stelara in 2009 for the treatment of psoriasis. It is one of the new classes of drugs called biologics. These drugs are engineered from proteins produced by living cells. The newest research focuses on psoriasis being caused by an overactive immune system. This medication specifically targets the shared subunit of substances called interleukin-12 and interleukin-23, which are responsible for producing much of the inflammation, redness, and scaling of psoriasis.

In the past, psoriasis was treated with either local treatment such as creams or ointments or whole body treatment such as phototherapy or oral medications. In many cases, these treatments can be effective, but in other cases are not successful.

Stelara is a medication that is administered in my office. The typical course is a subcutaneous injection once the medication is initially obtained, followed by another given in 4 weeks. Then an injection is given once every 3 months thereafter. The dosage of Stelara is based on your body weight. The long half-life of Stelara allows for the advantage of prolonged effectiveness with an infrequent dosing schedule. The administration is quite easy to perform and usually you are in and out for your appointments.

Before the treatment is started, a PPD test needs to be performed on the skin of your arm. This is a test that detects prior exposure to tuberculosis. If this test has not been done already, it can be easily performed in our office. Although it has not been shown, there is a chance that Stelara can have effects on your blood, liver and kidney, thus blood counts of these cells are measured at each of the visits.

Side effects with this treatment are usually rare with the majority being mild in intensity. As with any medication, there are potential allergic reactions. Because Stelara works on areas of the immune system, there are theoretical risks for increased infections and lymphomas. This requires you to be aware of your general health and report any problems such as a lingering cold or fever. If you have any problems with the treatment, please let me know.

Stelara is a medication that is potentially a significant advance over the previous treatments for psoriasis. It seems to work better than the more conventional treatments with fewer side effects. If you have any further questions regarding this medication, please ask me before you leave the office.