Activase (t-PA): A Medication Treatment for Ischemic Stroke

What is Activase?

Activase (also called tissue plasminogen activator or t-PA) is a medicine that can be used to treat patients with acute ischemic stroke. **Activase is a clot buster.** It dissolves the blood clot that is blocking the vessel and causing the stroke. It is the only FDA approved drug to treat this type of stroke.

For certain patients, Activase may improve the chances of recovery from stroke with little or no disability. Patients can receive Activase:

- Only if they get treatment within 4.5 hours after their stroke symptoms began (after 4.5 hours, brain damage is too great to respond to Activase).
- Only after they have had a brain scan.

Activase (t-PA) is given as an **intravenous (IV) infusion,** which takes about 1 hour.

Is Activase for *all* ischemic stroke patients?

No. Some patients cannot be treated with Activase, such as those who have:

- History of recent surgery or trauma to the head
- Recent previous stroke
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Problems with clotting

This is only a partial list of reasons not to be treated with Activase. Your doctor has worked quickly with you to find out whether this treatment is right for your situation.

Is Activase proven to work?

The Food and Drug Administration approved the use of Activase in 1996, based on results of a study sponsored by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). In this study, 31% of patients treated with Activase recovered from their stroke with little or no disability, compared to 20% of patients who were not treated with Activase. Recovery was measured 3 months after their stroke.

What about longer-term results?

Almost all of the patients who had good results at 3 months were still showing those results 1 year later. They scored well on being able to do daily activities such as eating, walking or bathing. After 1 year, 41% of patients who received Activase recovered with little or no disability, compared to 28% of those who did not receive Activase.

Are there risks involved with Activase?

Yes. Because Activase is a clot buster, it can cause bleeding in the brain. This can lead to serious damage, and may cause death. When intracranial hemorrhage (bleeding in the brain) occurs, it usually happens within the first day and a half after treatment. In the NINDS study, patients treated with Activase had more bleeding in the brain (6.4% within 1.5 days) than those not treated with Activase (0.6%). More patients with bleeding in the brain died in the first few hours after treatment.

Certain patients with ischemic stroke have an increased risk of bleeding in the brain, including:

- Patients over age 75
- Patients with severe problems thinking, feeling or moving
- Patients whose brain scans show early signs of many dead brain cells

What to expect after receiving Activase

Right after treatment, you will be watched closely in the intensive care unit for 24-48 hours. During this time, you will be examined often to see how your brain is recovering. We will also watch your heart rate and blood pressure.

Each person's response to treatment is different, depending on how severe their stroke was and other risk factors they may have. Some patients will begin to improve right away, while others take longer.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.

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