

# 'The Pink Drink' 5-Ala (Gliolan)

Providing support and information for patients and their families

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This leaflet has been prepared for you by the Neuro-oncology multidisciplinary team, Brighton and Sussex University Hospital Trust, to give you information about 5 ALA/GLIOLAN, also called the 'pink drink'.

It is not intended to replace an informed discussion with your Consultant Neurosurgeon who will explain your surgical procedure in detail.

Please speak to your Nurse Specialist if you have any further questions.

## What is 5-ALA?

5-ALA is also called 5-AminoLevulinicAcid or by the brand name, Gliolan. It is also called the pink drink. It is a white powder that is taken mixed with water.

## How does it work?

Once it has been drunk, 5-ALA is absorbed into the blood stream. It is carried into the brain and into the tumour. Under blue light, the 5-ALA makes the tumour glow pink or red, while the rest of the brain shows blue. During the operation, the surgeon can use a blue light filter on a microscope to see this.

This is useful because it shows the surgeon where the edges of the tumour are, so that it is easier to remove without risking damage to the rest of the brain. It also means that there is less risk of leaving parts of the tumour behind. This type of surgery, using 5-ALA, can only be done by a specially trained surgeon.

The 5-ALA will pass out of your body in your urine (wee).

## Why do I need to take it?

In some cases, your Consultant Neurosurgeon may feel that more of your tumour can be taken out using 5-ALA.

## How do I take 5-ALA?

You will take 5-ALA on the day of your surgery.

- You will be admitted to the ward on the night before your surgery, and will be scheduled first on the list of operations the next morning.
- 2-4 hours before your surgery is due to start, you will be given the 5-ALA to drink. A nurse or pharmacist will mix the powder with water and the appropriate amount of the solution will be given for you to drink. It will be a clear or slightly yellow-tinged liquid.
- Your blood pressure will be checked 30 minutes and then 60 minutes after you have drunk the 5-ALA.

## What are the risks of taking 5-ALA?

5-ALA may make your eyes and skin more sensitive to bright light for up to 24 hours. It is important to avoid bright light, including direct sunlight and brightly focused indoor light, for 24 hours once you have taken 5-ALA.

When you are in the anaesthetic room, operating theatre and recovery room, the staff will make sure you are protected from bright, direct light.

## What are the side effects of taking 5-ALA?

There are some side effects to taking 5-ALA that may occur after you have taken the medicine but before you have had the surgery.

### **These are uncommon (1 in 1000 people may experience these):**

- Hypotension: low blood pressure
- Nausea: feeling sick
- Skin sensitive to light (photosensitivity) and may look sunburned.

There are some side-effects that are caused because of the combined effects of the surgery, anaesthesia and the 5-ALA together.

### **These are:**

#### **Very common side effects (1 in 10 people may experience these):**

- Anaemia: lack of iron in the blood
- Thrombocytopenia: low blood platelet count
- Leucocytosis: increased white cell count in the blood
- Temporary liver problems.

#### **Common side effects (1 in 100 people may experience these):**

- Vomiting and feeling sick
- Neurological disorders: Hemiparesis (weaknesses in one side of the body), aphasia (problems understanding and speaking), convulsions, hemianopia (loss of one side of your field of vision)
- Thromboembolism: blood clots.

#### **Uncommon side effects (1 in 1000 people may experience these):**

- Brain oedema: a collection of fluid in the brain
- Hypotension: low blood pressure.

## Very rare side effects (1 in 10,000 people may experience these)

- Hypoesthesia: having a reduced sense of touch
- Diarrhoea.

Whether you have any of these side effects, how long they last, and how severe they are, depends on where your tumour is located and how large it is.

## What if I am taking other medicines?

Please tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking or have recently taken any other medicines, particularly medicines that may cause skin problems when the skin comes into contact with strong light, for example some types of antibiotics. This includes medicines obtained without prescription, for example hypericin or St John's wort extracts.

You should not take any medicines like this for up to 2 weeks after you have taken 5-ALA.

### **Do not take 5-ALA:**

- If you are allergic to 5-aminolevulinic acid hydrochloride [5-ALA] or porphyrins.
- If you have or are suspected to have acute or chronic types of porphyria.

## What if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

5-ALA should not be used during pregnancy. If you are breastfeeding, you should stop breastfeeding for 24 hours after taking this medicine, because it is not known whether it enters your milk supply.

## What precautions do I have to take after drinking 5-ALA?

Neurosurgeons and the nursing staff will make sure that you are not exposed to direct sunlight or strong light sources for up to 24 hours.

You should avoid direct exposure to strong sunlight or any photosensitizing agents such as sun beds or sun lamp treatments for two weeks.

## Useful resources

You can find more information about 5-ALA here:

Short film about surgery using 5-ALA, by Stand Up To Cancer:

<http://bit.ly/5ALAsurgery>

The Brain Tumour Charity:

<http://bit.ly/thepinkdrink5ALA>

## How to contact us

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**Disclaimer**

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

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