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Summary

Pilocarpine is not recommended as a first line treatment for a dry mouth. Other topical products such as artificial saliva products should be tried first. Pilocarpine tablets are indicated for the treatment of a dry mouth. Pilocarpine tablets are unlicensed in Ireland. There is limited information available to support the use of pilocarpine eye drops as an alternative. Considering the information outlined below, a recommended dose of 5mg-10mg three times daily of oral pilocarpine tablets would be the approximately equivalent to pilocarpine 4% 3-5 drops (6mg-10mg) taken orally three times daily. Pilocarpine should be discontinued if there is no improvement after 2 days if the dry mouth is drug-induced or after 12 weeks if it is radiation-induced. The use of pilocarpine eye drops to treat a dry mouth is unlicensed. Therefore, the prescriber assumes full responsibility for the administration of pilocarpine in this manner.

Information

Pilocarpine tablets are indicated for the treatment of dry mouth following irradiation for head and neck cancer and for dry mouth and dry eyes in Sjogren’s syndrome. 1,2,3,4

Palliative Meds Info: Terms and Conditions

The information outlined above is intended for healthcare professionals only. The information outlined above is believed to accurately reflect the medical literature at the time of writing. Healthcare professionals must use their own judgment to determine the accuracy and relevance of the information. See www.olh.ie for full terms and conditions.
Unfortunately, pilocarpine tablets are unlicensed in Ireland. Pilocarpine eye drops are available and they are indicated for use as a mitotic for reversing the action of weaker mydriatics and in the emergency treatment of glaucoma.⁵

Pilocarpine is a parasympathomimetic (predominantly muscarinic) drug with mild-adrenergic activity which stimulates secretion from exocrine glands, including salivary glands.⁶ The recommended oral dose of pilocarpine for dry mouth following radiation therapy is 5-10mg three times daily.¹²³⁴⁷ The recommended dose for drug-induced dry mouth is 5mg three times daily or less.⁶

The Palliative Care Formulary (PCF) recommends that generally topical measures (including the use of artificial saliva products) should be tried before resorting to a pilocarpine.⁶ It states that it is less expensive to prescribe pilocarpine eye drops than tablets for the treatment of a drug-induced dry mouth. It advises that 2 drops of pilocarpine 4% is equivalent to 4mg orally.⁶ The PCF recommends that if there is no improvement after 2 days discontinue the tablets if the dry mouth is drug-induced, or after 12 weeks if it is radiation-induced.⁶

In a short report reviewing ‘The use of pilocarpine in opioid-induced xerostomia,’ by Calderone et al, 21 patients were treated with pilocarpine (eye drops 2% solution) 5mg by mouth three times daily. The timing of the response to pilocarpine seemed to be almost immediate, as the effect was observed within 24 hours.⁸

Bowel obstruction, asthma and COPD are contra-indications to its use of pilocarpine. The most common adverse effect is sweating.⁷ Other adverse effects include nausea, flushing, urinary frequency, intestinal colic and weakness.⁷
References:


