

Methotrexate



Singapore
General Hospital
SingHealth

This leaflet only provides information for patients being treated with methotrexate (25mg or less per week).

About your medicine

- Methotrexate is an immunosuppressant which acts by slowing the production of new cells by the body's immune system.
- At low dose, methotrexate is used in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, and other inflammatory diseases such as psoriatic arthritis.
- It is one of the disease-modifying-anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) which can modify the progress of clinical disease by reducing permanent damage to joints caused by continuing inflammation.
- It may be combined with other DMARDs or biologic agent to adequately control the disease.

How is the medicine given?

- It is given orally, after food, usually once a week.
- A typical dose will range from 7.5mg to 25mg per week.
- Dosage varies among individuals depending upon many factors such as how active your disease is and how you respond to treatment.
- Methotrexate tablets should be swallowed whole, with a glass of water and not crushed or chewed.
- Inform your doctor immediately if you have problem swallowing the tablets.

- If you vomit within a few hours after taking methotrexate, do not take another dose. Make a note and let your doctor know if this happens again the following week.
- Some patients may be treated by injection every week.
- Do not touch the tablets directly with your hands. Instead, use medicine spoon or cup to take the drug.

How long does it take for the medicine to be effective?

- Improvement is usually first seen in 3 to 4 weeks. The full benefit of this drug may not be seen until after 12 weeks of treatment.
- You may need to take methotrexate continuously to keep your symptoms controlled.

What should I do if I forget a dose?

- If you have missed a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If this is within two days of the scheduled dose. E.g. Scheduled dose is on Monday, if remembers on Wednesday, take on Wednesday and return to Monday schedule the next week.
- Otherwise, skip the missed dose and continue with your regular dosing schedule. E.g. Scheduled dose is on Monday, if remembers on Friday, skip dose and take usual dose next Monday.
- Do not double the dose to make up for the missed dose.

Do I skip dose if I am sick?

- Seek prompt advice from your doctor when you develop any of the serious symptoms of infection described above.
- Your doctor will decide whether to stop methotrexate based on case-by-case basis.

What are the possible side effects of the medicine?

- Most people on low dose methotrexate cope well with some effects. However, you should be aware of some of the problems which can occur.
- Early side effects:
 - Nausea
 - Vomiting
 - Loss of appetite
 - Dizziness
- Delayed side effects:
 - Diarrhoea
 - Mouth ulcers
 - Drop in blood counts
 - Hair loss
 - Malaise
 - Sterility
 - Skin rash may occur with excessive exposure to the sun

When do I seek immediate medical attention?

- Come back to the hospital if you have:
 - High fever (exceeds 38°C) or other symptoms of infection such as chills, cough or painful urination
 - Mouth ulcers or severe sore throat that does not heal within 3 days
 - Excessive diarrhoea and/or vomiting
 - Bruises or unusual bleeding
 - Black stools, dark urine or vomiting of blood

- Jaundice (yellowing of skin or whites of eyes)
- Breathlessness or persistent dry cough
- Chickenpox and shingles – if you have not had chickenpox and you come into contact with someone with chickenpox or shingles.

What should I do when I am taking the medicine?

- Come back to the hospital for regular blood tests as instructed by your doctor. This is important as adverse effects can happen at any time during the course of treatment, and some side effects may not show symptoms.
- Do not take methotrexate unless you are having regular blood tests.
- Avoid prolonged exposure to sun and use sunscreen as this medicine may cause the skin to become more sensitive to sunlight.
- Avoid overcrowded places.

Can I take other medicines or supplements?

- Your doctor may prescribe pain-relieving treatments since methotrexate is not a pain killer. Avoid taking more than what is prescribed.
- Folic acid tablet may be prescribed to prevent or decrease certain side effects. It is usually taken a day after methotrexate.
- Special care should be taken with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g. ibuprofen) and certain antibiotics (e.g. co-trimoxazole), and should only be prescribed by your doctor.
- You should avoid live vaccines such as live polio, yellow fever, rubella (German measles), MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), typhoid and BCG (tuberculosis).

- Flu and pneumococcal vaccines are safe and may be given if required.
- Always check with the doctor or pharmacist first before self-treatment with any over-the-counter medicines.
- Do not take any supplements, alternative or herbal medicines without informing your doctor or pharmacist.

What special dietary instructions should I follow?

- Maintain adequate hydration (2 to 3 litres of fluid a day, unless otherwise advised by your doctor) and nutrition (small, frequent meals are preferred).
- Alcohol should be avoided if possible or kept to a minimum as suggested by your rheumatologist because alcohol may increase the risk of liver toxicity associated with methotrexate.
- Do not consume raw or undercooked food.

Can I start a family or breastfeed?

- Methotrexate can cause fetal death and abnormalities. Hence, pregnancy should be avoided during the treatment and at least six months after stopping methotrexate.
- Both men and women of childbearing age should use a reliable method of contraception to avoid the risk of an unplanned pregnancy during treatment.
- Methotrexate also affects the fertility of men. When planning a pregnancy it is important to discuss with your doctor.
- For mothers receiving methotrexate, breastfeeding should be avoided.

How should I store the medicine?

- Keep the tablets in an air-tight, amber container. Store away from heat, moist and direct sunlight.
- Keep all medicines out of reach of children.
- Do not dispose any medicines via wastewater or household waste. Ask your pharmacist how to dispose of medicines which are no longer needed. These measures will help protect the environment.

In Summary

What you need to know about methotrexate?

- Take methotrexate once weekly on the same day and appropriately the same time, unless instructed otherwise by your doctor.
- Folic acid is taken once weekly, usually the day after methotrexate, unless instructed otherwise by your doctor.
- Always come for your blood tests on the scheduled date.
- Beware of the side effects and know when to get immediate medical attention.
- Have the annual flu vaccine.
- Do not take over-the-counter medicines, supplements or herbal medicines without checking with your doctor/pharmacist/advanced practice nurse first.
- For patients who intend to start a family, consult your doctor before you start the treatment.
- If you have any questions about the treatment, please discuss it with your doctor/advanced practice nurse at 65762418 or Pharmacist at 63265077.

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