An Overview of Methotrexate for Patients

What is methotrexate?
Methotrexate is an immuno-suppressive and anti-inflammatory medicine. This medicine is used to slow disease progression in patients who are less responsive to conventional therapy. Since it is an immunosuppressive medicine, it can lower the number of white blood cells in your blood, potentially increasing the chance of getting an infection.

How is methotrexate taken?
This medicine is taken orally (by mouth). Your health care provider will order your weekly dose.

Your prescription label tells you how much to take and how often to take it. Follow these instructions carefully, and ask your pharmacist, doctor, or nurse to explain anything you don’t understand.

Methotrexate should be taken once a week. Taking it more frequently can lead to serious side effects.

It is important to take this medicine regularly as prescribed. Do not stop taking it. Do not take more or less of this medicine than prescribed.

Special instructions

- Methotrexate occasionally causes loss of appetite, indigestion, nausea, or vomiting around the day you take the medicine. If you experience these symptoms, an antacid (Tums®, Maalox®, Mylanta®) might help decrease indigestion. Contact your doctor/nurse team if symptoms persist.

- Tell your health care provider about other medical problems you have, especially stomach ulcers, colitis, immune system disease, liver or kidney disease, or a blood disorder.

- You will need to take folic acid (a vitamin) daily while on methotrexate. Folic acid helps prevent red blood cell abnormalities and reduces side effects.

- Do not have any vaccinations or immunizations without the approval of your health care provider. Avoid close contact with people who have had an oral polio vaccine. Other people in your household should not receive the oral polio vaccine while you are taking methotrexate. Check with your health care provider if you have any concerns.

- Take precautions to avoid infection (wash your hands frequently) while taking this
Avoid anyone who might have an infection (colds, flu, tuberculosis), and report any signs of infection to your health care provider.

While taking methotrexate, you might be more sensitive to light and might burn easily. Avoid excessive exposure to sunlight, sun lamps, or tanning booths. Use sunblock when outside.

Do not take this medicine if you are pregnant or if your partner could become pregnant. Methotrexate might cause birth defects if the mother or father is taking it at the time of conception. Use reliable birth control during treatment and for at least 3 months after you stop treatment. Call your health care provider if you think you are pregnant.

Do not drink beer, wine, or any other alcoholic beverage at any time while taking this medicine. Alcohol can increase the risk of liver problems.

Will I need laboratory tests?
While you are taking this medicine, blood tests will be ordered (blood cell count and liver function tests) to monitor for adverse effects. Keep all appointments with your health care provider and the laboratory.

You must also have a yearly chest X-ray and PPD (tuberculosis) skin test while you are on methotrexate.

What are the possible side effects?
This medicine is generally tolerated well. It is important to remember that not everyone experiences side effects.

The following side effects need immediate attention. Call 911 or go to the emergency room.

- Black, tarry stools
- Bloody vomit
- Fever over 101°F or chills
- Convulsions (seizures)

The following side effects need attention as soon as possible. Call your health care provider for these.

- Bloody or dark urine
- Blurred vision
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Pain in joints, low back or side
- Sores in mouth or on lips
- Stomach pain
- Unusual bleeding or bruising
- Yellow eyes or skin
- Prolonged cough

The following are common side effects:

- Nausea, vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Hair loss
- Fatigue
- Decreased resistance to infection

Can I take other medicines with methotrexate?
Combining certain medicines might alter their action or produce unwanted side effects. Before taking this medicine, tell your health care provider about any prescription or non-prescription medicine (vitamins, herbal supplements, over-the-counter medicines) that you take or are planning to take.

Do not take any of the following medicines without first checking with your health care provider:

- Aspirin
- Sulfa drugs
- Phenylbutazone
- Bactrim®
- Septra®
- Dilantin®
Anticoagulants
Probenecid
NSAIDS:

- Advil®
- Aleve®
- Motrin®
- Ibuprofen
- Naprosyn®
- Nuprin®

You may take Tylenol®, if needed.

Make sure any health care provider you see is aware that you are taking methotrexate.

**What should I do if I forget to take a dose?**
If you miss a dose, call your health care provider for further instructions. Do not double dose.

If you have any questions regarding this treatment, please contact your Mellen Center health care provider.