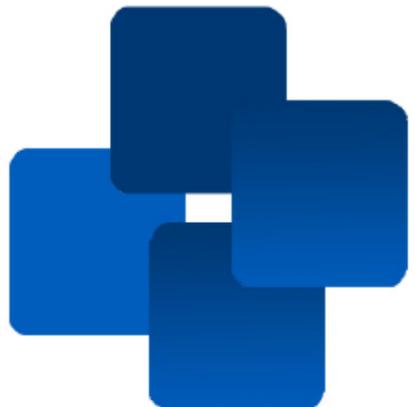


Patient Information

Oral Methotrexate

Pharmacy Department



What is Methotrexate?

Methotrexate is a well established, effective treatment for several different types of inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, Crohn's disease, Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) and severe psoriasis. It may also be used for other conditions.

What can it do?

It can reduce damage to joints, skin and other tissues. It is not a painkiller.

Seeing the benefits

It may be 3 to 12 weeks after reaching the best dose for your condition before you notice any benefits, but it is working during this period. Many of the conditions that are treated with methotrexate are long term and methotrexate may need to be taken for several years.

Your dose

Once a week

Your tablets should **only** be taken **once a week** on the **same day** each week.

How to take methotrexate

You should take the tablets by mouth. Swallow the tablets whole, with a glass of water and do not crush or chew them.

Take care

Handle the tablets as little as possible. Store them at room temperature and **keep out of the reach and sight of children** and other members of the family.

Depending upon how well the tablets work for you, the dose you need to take may change. If your dose changes, the number of tablets you take will change, but you will still only need to take them **once a week**.

Methotrexate is made in two different strengths, 2.5mg and 10mg, but **you should only take the 2.5mg tablets** even if the dose is increased. The two strengths are different shapes but are a very similar colour, so **always check that your doctor or pharmacist has given you the right strength.**

Do not take the tablets if you think you have the wrong strength - check with your doctor or pharmacist as soon as possible.

If you are sick

If you are sick within a few hours of taking methotrexate tell your hospital specialist / GP. Do not take another dose unless told to do so by the doctor. You may be told to wait until the next dose is due the following week.

Patients who are regularly sick after every dose may be given methotrexate by injection instead or may be told that the dose on that day of the week may be given in divided doses.

Why you need regular blood tests

When you start taking methotrexate, your doctor will monitor your blood results to ensure that the dose is right for you and not adversely affecting your body. Your doctor may increase or decrease the number of tablets you take at each dose depending upon the results of your tests.

It is important that you do not miss your blood test - you must not take methotrexate unless you are having regular blood tests every 2 to 12 weeks, as directed by your doctor.

Methotrexate may reduce the production of blood cells and this can make you more vulnerable to infections. Blood tests will show if you are developing any side effects. If your blood, liver, kidneys or lungs are being affected, your treatment may need to be changed or stopped immediately.

Avoid having blood tests done directly after taking your dose as this can mask any changes.

Possible side effects

Most people do well on methotrexate but it can affect your immune system and make you more vulnerable to infection. Occasionally it can also produce side effects, some immediately and some within a few weeks.

Immediate side effects (within 48 hours)

Tell your doctor if these symptoms persist or occur after every dose:

- Sickness
- Diarrhoea
- Skin rashes

Delayed side effects (within 2 to 3 weeks)

- Mouth ulcers
- Hair loss

Long term side effects (these side effects are rare)

- Inflammation of the lung - if you become breathless, tell your doctor immediately.
- Bone marrow damage - your regular blood count test will check how well your bone marrow is working. Possible indicators of bone marrow damage are anaemia, increased infections, and excessive bruising and bleeding.
- Inflammation and scarring of the liver - your regular blood tests will detect this.

The patient information leaflet in your tablet packet has a more detailed list of possible side effects.

Folic acid tablets are usually prescribed as they can reduce the likelihood of side effects. You may be asked to take these tablets on one or more days of the week, **but not on the day you take your methotrexate or the day after.**

Things to tell your doctor immediately

If you have any of the following, tell your doctor immediately:

- Infections including fever, chills or sore throat
- Unexplained skin rash, ulcerations or soreness of skin
- Yellowing of the skin or generalised itching
- Bleeding gums, black tarry stools or unexpected bleeding or bruising
- Chest pain, difficulty breathing or a dry, persistent cough
- Sore mouth or mouth ulcers
- Severe and continuing diarrhoea, vomiting or stomach pains
- Vaginal inflammation or ulcers

See your doctor if you develop any new symptoms after starting methotrexate.

Chicken pox and shingles

If you are taking methotrexate and you develop chicken pox or shingles and it seems to be severe, you should see your doctor as you may need special treatment.

Other advice

Taking other medicines

Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medicine. This includes some antibiotics such as co-trimoxazole (Bactrim®, Septrin®) and trimethoprim which are best avoided, and also medicines you can buy at a garage, newsagents, supermarket or chemist such as aspirin, ibuprofen (such as Nurofen) and other painkillers and medicines for coughs, colds and flu. This equally applies to herbal and alternative remedies. These can react with methotrexate and affect your treatment.

Also, the symptoms you are trying to treat may be a sign that methotrexate is not working safely for you. It is important for your doctor or pharmacist to know so they can help you. Keep a record of any symptoms and discuss them with your doctor.

Drinking alcohol

Alcohol can react with methotrexate and increase the risk of liver damage, so it is advisable to drink alcohol as little as possible (try to keep below 10 units per week). However, an occasional drink may not be expected to cause significant side effects. Your doctor can give you more information and advice about this.

Food

Food made from unpasteurised milk, such as soft cheese and uncooked meats such as pâté, may be a source of bacteria which could increase your risk of infection and are best avoided. Read food labels carefully.

Vaccinations

Your doctor or nurse should not offer you any immunisation injection that have any of the **live** vaccines such as rubella (German measles), MMR, yellow fever and polio. An 'inactivated' polio vaccine can be used instead of the 'live' vaccine.

Flu vaccines, however, are safe.

Having a baby

Methotrexate may reduce fertility in men and women. It may also damage an unborn child.

Women

Do not take methotrexate if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. It is recommended that you wait six months after finishing your treatment before trying to become pregnant. You should talk to your doctor or nurse about effective contraception.

Men

It is recommended that you wait six months after finishing your treatment before trying to father a child as your sperm can be affected. You should use effective contraception - talk to your doctor or nurse if you need advice.

Additional information

If your treatment ends and you have some tablets left over, please return them to your pharmacist. Do not flush them down the toilet or throw them away.

When you were given this leaflet, you should also have received a booklet for recording your blood test results. This will help you, your doctor and pharmacist know that the dose is right for you and not adversely affecting your body. If you did not receive one, ask your hospital clinic for a copy.

Please carry the blood test booklet with you so that you can show it to a doctor or pharmacist if needed, especially if you are admitted to hospital and also if you are collecting a prescription for methotrexate from your local pharmacy.

Contact telephone numbers

Rheumatology Advice Line:	01438 285624
Arthritis Care Helpline: www.arthritiscare.org.uk	0808 800 4050
Inflammatory Bowel Disease Specialist Nurses:	01438 285764
Dermatology Helpline:	01438 284590
Pharmacy Dedicated Patient Helpline: Monday to Friday, 2pm - 4pm e-mail: medinfo.enhtr@nhs.net	01438 286150

Further information

Further information can be obtained from the National Patient Safety Agency.

An oral methotrexate pre-treatment patient information leaflet is available at <http://www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/?entryid45=59800>

Select "PDF document 0267 - Oral methotrexate patient information leaflet and dosage record booklet".

Date of publication: December 2013
Author: Selina Jiwani/NPSA
Reference: Methotrexate Version: 02 (Nov 2016)
Review Date: November 2019
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