

## Patient information

### **Azathioprine for Haematology disorders**

#### Haematology Liverpool

#### **What is azathioprine?**

Azathioprine belongs to a group of medicines called “immunosuppressants”. It is a well-established, effective treatment for several different conditions. The person prescribing this medicine should give you information about the condition it is being prescribed for.

#### **What does azathioprine do?**

It reduces the strength of the immune system (the body’s own defence system) which may be over active in some conditions. As a result your body might not be as good at fighting infections. It may be prescribed for patients on steroid treatment so that their steroid dose can be smaller or as an alternative to steroid treatment. It may be 3 to 12 weeks before you notice any benefits, but it is working during this period. Azathioprine may need to be taken long term.

#### **How to take azathioprine?**

Azathioprine is usually taken as a tablet once or twice a day, initially at a low dose (e.g. 50mg each day), and this may be increased as necessary. The dose you are given will depend on your body weight.

The tablets should be swallowed with a glass of water, with or after food. Taking the dose after food might reduce stomach upset but you should keep the timing consistent and tell your doctor if you start taking the dose with food. The dose should not be taken with milk or dairy products. Azathioprine should be taken at least one hour before or two hours after milk or dairy products. Take care to handle the tablets as little as possible and wash your hands after handling them. Store them at room temperature and out of children’s reach. Wash your hands after handling the tablets. Azathioprine is made in two different strengths, 25mg and 50mg. Always check you have been given the right strength by your doctor or pharmacist. Do not take the tablets if you think you have the wrong strength and check with your doctor or pharmacist as soon as possible. Depending upon how well the tablets work for you, the dose and number of tablets that you need to take may change.

#### **What if I forget to take a dose?**

If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as possible, unless it is almost time to take the next dose. Do not take a double dose. Then go on as before. If you miss several doses, tell your doctor. If you are sick within a few hours of taking azathioprine do not take another dose or double up your next dose. If you are repeatedly sick contact your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice.

## **Do I need any special checks while on azathioprine?**

Azathioprine reduces the production of blood cells making you more vulnerable to infections and can sometimes affect the liver. Blood tests will show if you are developing any side effects. If you are being affected, your treatment will be changed or stopped immediately. These blood tests will be weekly at the start of your treatment and then less frequent once you are stable with your treatment. It is important that you do not miss your blood test. Your doctor may increase or decrease the number of tablets you take at each dose depending upon the results of your tests.

## **What are the possible side effects?**

Azathioprine has a number of side effects. However, everyone reacts differently to medicines, and it is very unlikely that you will have all the listed effects.

- Taking azathioprine can affect the blood count (one of the effects is that fewer blood cells are made). Your regular blood count test will check how well your bone marrow is working. You should inform your doctor, nurse or pharmacist immediately if you have a sore throat, fever or any signs of infection, unexpected bruising or bleeding.
- Very occasionally, azathioprine causes liver disease. Your regular blood test will check how well your liver is working and detect any early signs of damage. Possible indicators of liver disease are yellowing of the skin or generalised itching, if you notice this then you should inform your doctor, nurse or pharmacist immediately.

Azathioprine may also cause nausea or feeling sick, vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, hair loss, skin rashes, sensitivity to sunlight. If you have any of these effects, you do not need contact the doctor unless they persist for more than a few days or become unbearable.

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

Do not take azathioprine if you are allergic to azathioprine, 6-mercaptopurine or any of the other ingredients in this medicine.

Tell your doctor immediately if you have swelling of your face, lips, tongue or throat, with difficulty breathing - you might be having a serious allergic reaction to the medicine (called anaphylaxis).

## **Taking other medicines**

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new medications. And remember to mention you're on azathioprine if you're treated by anyone other than your usual haematology team.

- Do not take allopurinol (a medicine to treat gout) without discussing with the haematology team.
- Other medicines that interact with azathioprine include trimethoprim, co-trimoxazole, methotrexate and warfarin.

## **Pregnancy and breastfeeding**

If you're planning a family or become pregnant while taking azathioprine, you should discuss this with your doctor.

Current guidelines say that azathioprine can be taken if trying for a baby and when pregnant or breastfeeding. Men can also continue taking azathioprine when trying for a baby.

## **Vaccines**

If you need to have a vaccine (a live vaccine) while taking azathioprine, talk to your doctor or pharmacist first. Your doctor will advise you on what vaccines you can have. There are vaccinations which are important to receive (including the influenza and COVID vaccines), however due to the immunosuppressive effect of azathioprine you may not get as good a level of protection as someone who is not taking azathioprine.

## **Feedback**

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

## **Further information**

**For Further information please contact  
Clinical Haematology 0151 706 3397  
Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 3397**

**Author: Haematology Liverpool  
Review date: April 2027**

All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

يمكن توفير جميع المعلومات المتعلقة بالمرضى الموافق عليهم من قبل انتمان المستشفى عند الطلب بصيغ أخرى، بما في ذلك لغات أخرى وبطرق تسهل قراءتها وبالحروف الطباعة الكبيرة وبالصوت وبطريقة برايل للمكفوفين وبطريقة مون والكترونياً.

所有經信托基金批准的患者資訊均可以其它格式提供，包括其它語言、易讀閱讀軟件、大字體、音頻、盲文、穆恩體 ( Moon ) 盲文和電子格式，敬請索取。

در صورت تمایل می‌توانید کلیه اطلاعات تصویب شده توسط اتحادیه در رابطه با بیماران را به اشکال مختلف در دسترس داشته باشید، از جمله به زبانهای دیگر، به زبان ساده، چاپ درشت، صوت، خط مخصوص کوران، مون و بصورت روی خطی موجود است.

زانباری پیوندیدار بهو نه‌خوشانه‌ی له‌لایه‌ن تراسته‌وه پسه‌ند کراون، نه‌گمر داوا بکریت له فورماته‌کانی تردا بریتی له زمانه‌کانی تر، نیزی رید (هاسان خویندنه‌وه)، چاپی گموره، شریتی دهنگ، هیلی موون و ئه‌لیکترۆنیکی همیه.

所有经信托基金批准的患者信息均可以其它格式提供，包括其它语言、易读阅读软件、大字体、音频、盲文、穆恩体 ( Moon ) 盲文和电子格式，敬请索取。

Dhammaan warbixinta bukaanleyda ee Ururka ee la oggol yahay waxaa marka la codsado lagu heli karaa nuskhado kale, sida luqado kale, akhris fudud, far waaweyn, dhegeysi, farta braille ee dadka indhaha la', Moon iyo nidaam eletaroonig ah.