

Drugs for Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) - Methotrexate

What is methotrexate?

Methotrexate is an immunosuppressant drug. It works by reducing the activity of cells in the body's immune system (the system that helps fight infection), and can reduce inflammation.

Because it reduces the body's defence system it needs to be used with care.

How often do I take methotrexate?

It is very important to remember that it is only taken **once a week on the same day**. The tablets should be taken with food and swallowed whole (not crushed or chewed).

What dose do I take?

This will be decided with your doctor. The starting dose is usually 10mg or 15mg once a week. The tablet form of methotrexate comes as 2.5mg strength.

Your doctor may gradually increase the dose. Some patients are given methotrexate by injection into the muscle in your upper arm.

How long will it take to work?

It does not work immediately. It may take up to 12 weeks before it has a full effect.

What are the common side effects?

The most common side effects are a feeling of sickness, diarrhoea, mouth ulcers and skin rashes.

You can be more prone to infections because of the way that methotrexate works.

If you develop a severe sore throat or any other infection, or have a fever, jaundice, bruise easily, or develop any new symptoms you must see your GP and contact your IBD Specialist Nurse, as depending on your symptoms the methotrexate may need to be stopped.

Rarely, methotrexate can cause lung problems that can result in a feeling of breathlessness. If you become breathless you must see your GP immediately and contact your IBD Specialist Nurse.

If come into contact with someone with chicken pox or shingles and/or other infections you should see your GP immediately and contact your IBD specialist nurse as you may need to attend hospital to have a blood test and start some treatment.

Most doctors prescribe folic acid tablets to reduce the chances of developing side effects with methotrexate, as methotrexate can affect the metabolism of this vitamin in your body.

It is important that you avoid contact with other people with infections

Do I continue my other treatments for inflammatory bowel disease?

Yes.

Do I need any special checks while on methotrexate?

Because methotrexate can affect the blood count and occasionally cause liver

problems, your doctor will arrange regular blood tests.

It is very important that these blood counts are done regularly.

Your doctor will usually arrange for you to have a chest x-ray before starting treatment with methotrexate to check for any lung disorders.

Can I take other medication along with methotrexate?

Some drugs can interact with methotrexate and it is important to tell any doctor treating you that you are on methotrexate.

It is particularly important that you avoid a group of antibiotics called the sulphonamides, of which the most commonly used is called co-trimoxazole (Septrin), and another antibiotic called trimethoprim.

You should also avoid using non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen and aspirin.

It is also important to tell your doctor, IBD nurse or pharmacist about any other medicines you are taking or thinking of taking, including over the counter medicines, such as cold or flu remedies, multivitamins, herbal, complimentary or alternative therapies.

Can I have immunisation while on methotrexate?

Flu vaccinations are safe but you should avoid immunisation with live vaccines such as polio and rubella (German measles).

Can I drink alcohol on methotrexate?

Too much alcohol can interact with methotrexate but small amounts (21 units per week for men, 14 units per week for women) are unlikely to be harmful.

Does methotrexate affect fertility and pregnancy?

Methotrexate can reduce fertility and is harmful to an unborn baby.

While you are on methotrexate, and **for six months after stopping methotrexate**, both men and women should take contraceptive measures.

If you become pregnant while you are on methotrexate you should contact your doctor as soon as possible.

If you are planning a family you should discuss this with your doctor before you are due to start this treatment.

Where can I obtain further information about methotrexate?

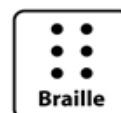
If you have any questions about methotrexate, ask your doctor, the IBD specialist nurse or your pharmacist.

Further Information:

Andrew Kneebone Lead IBD Nurse Specialist

Tracey Rimmer IBD Nurse Specialist
Helpline: 0151 529 4801

Author: IBD Nurse Specialists
Directorate – Gastroenterology



If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on audio tape or disk and in other languages on request. Please contact:

Tel No: 0151 529 2906

Email: interpretationandtranslation@aintree.nhs.uk