

Methotrexate for eye (ocular) inflammation

Department of Ophthalmology

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Information for Patients

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What is methotrexate?

Methotrexate is a drug that can be helpful for people with the eye inflammation. It was not originally designed to treat this, but, it is now given to patients who have this condition as it has proved to be useful in controlling the symptoms of the illness.

Please note: It is important that you read the manufacturer's leaflet as well as this one because it contains general information about the drug that you will need to know.

Please remember that it is not written for patients with eye (ocular) inflammation so some of the information in it may not be relevant to you.

Why have I been given methotrexate?

You have been given this drug to improve your eye condition. It is an immunosuppressant. It helps to reduce inflammation. It tends to improve the symptoms over a longer period of time. If you are on painkillers or anti-inflammatory drugs, it is important that you should continue to take them unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

What does methotrexate look like?

Methotrexate tablets are small and yellow. Although the tablets come in 2 strengths (2.5mg and 10mg), make sure you are only given the 2.5mg strength.

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or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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How will methotrexate help me?

Methotrexate works by suppressing inflammation, by acting on certain cells in the immune system. It may take up to 2 months before you notice an improvement in your condition.

What dose of methotrexate should I take?

Methotrexate is taken once a week on the same day each week. Your doctor will advise you about the exact dose. Most patients start on 4 x 2.5mg tablets (10mg). Your doctor may increase the dose if needed. Always remember your dose in milligram (mg) terms and not just as the number of tablets. This will make it much clearer and avoid any errors when discussing what medication you are taking.

You will be asked to take a high dose vitamin supplement of folic acid. Folic acid must **not** be taken on the same day as methotrexate. This will help to reduce any side effects especially feeling sick. You may be asked to take folic acid 5mg, 1 to 2 days after the methotrexate dose. Your doctor will advise you.

Are there any side effects?

All drugs can have side effects, although most patients do not experience these.

Side effects include:

- Being sick (vomiting)
- Mouth ulcers
- Inflammation of the liver
- This medication can lower the amount of blood cells that help your body fight infection. This is rare, and you will have regular blood tests to check for this.
- Inflammation of the lungs. This is an allergic reaction that is very rare. It is important that you tell your doctor right away if you develop unexplained or unexpected shortage of breath and/or persistent dry cough.
- Hair thinning. This is rarely a serious problem and if it happens to you, your hair will grow back once you have stopped taking methotrexate.
- Increased sensitivity to sunlight. This makes you more prone to sunburn and rashes.

Is there anything I should look out for?

Please tell your doctor or specialist nurse if you have:

- a sore throat
- a fever
- any signs of infection (redness/swelling/pain)
- unexplained bruising or bleeding
- any new symptoms or anything else that concerns you

Please note: As part of your monitoring you will need to have regular blood tests. Please remember it is very important for you to attend for regular blood tests. You must not take methotrexate unless you are having regular checks.

Can I take other drugs or medicines along with methotrexate?

Some drugs may interact with methotrexate. You should always tell your general practitioner (GP), dentist, or hospital doctor that you are taking this drug.

You must not be given any of the following antibiotics:

- Co-trimoxazole (Septrin)
- Trimethoprim (Monotrim or Trimogal)

You should not take over-the-counter medicines without talking to your doctor or pharmacist first.

Large doses of aspirin should be avoided.

Is there anything else I should avoid while taking methotrexate?

You should avoid being out in the sun for long periods at a time and wear protective clothing, sunglasses and sunscreen SPF 30 or above. Methotrexate may make your skin sensitive to sunlight. It can increase your chance of skin cancer.

Do not use sun beds.

Methotrexate may lower your ability to fight infection. There are some reports of bacteria (germs) found in food that may cause a problem to those who are less able to fight infections.

Cooked chilled foods should be reheated thoroughly.

Salads should be washed well. Avoid ready-prepared supermarket salads.

Do not eat soft cheese made from unpasteurised milk.

You should avoid contact with anyone who has chickenpox or shingles especially if you have not had these infections. If you develop either, you should stop taking your medication and seek medical advice promptly.

If you need to be immunised, you must tell your GP that you are on this medication. Some 'live' vaccines should not be given to patients on methotrexate.

Other immunisations that are not 'live' and can be given while on methotrexate although they may be less effective whilst you are on this drug.

Can I start a family whilst on methotrexate?

Whether you are a male or a female on this drug, and if you want to start a family, you should talk to your doctor as soon as possible. You may need to come off your medication.

If you decide to stop taking methotrexate so you can start a family you will need to continue to have protected sex for 6 weeks after you come off your medication. Talk to your GP about effective forms of contraception.

If you are a woman on methotrexate and think you might be pregnant, you should see your GP for advice.

Can I drink alcohol while taking methotrexate?

Alcohol could cause potential liver problems and so is best avoided.

What happens if I miss a dose?

You should try to remember to take the medication on the same day each week. If you forget to take your methotrexate, take the usual dose up to 48 hours later. Continue on the normal day the following week.

Do not increase your dose. **Do not** take more often than once a week.

Do make a note of any missed doses and tell a member of clinic staff at your next visit.



Important things to remember

- Keep all medicines out of children's reach
- Take your medicine as prescribed. Do not stop or change the dose unless your doctor tells you to
- Do not give your medicine to anyone else, even if they have the same condition as you
- Make sure you attend your follow-up hospital appointments even when you feel well and your symptoms are under control
- Please tell the hospital if you are not able to attend your clinic appointment so other arrangements can be made
- Make sure you have enough tablets to last you until your next appointment

Who should I contact if I have any concerns?

If you have any concerns or questions about this treatment you can contact:

Uveitis Nurse Specialist: 07939 978 826

Corneal Nurses Specialist: 07970940125

Eye Casualty Department: 0116 258 6273

Ophthalmology Secretary (uveitis): 0116 258 6198

Ophthalmology Secretary (cornea): 0116 258 5913

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