

AZATHIOPRINE (Gastroenterology)**Other names:** Imuran®, Azamun®, Thioprine®

Important note: The following information is intended to add to, not replace, the knowledge and judgment of your doctor, pharmacist or other health care professional.

Why you are taking this medication

Azathioprine (ay-za-THYE-oh-preen) works by suppressing the body's immune defence system so that it is unable to mount an inflammatory response in the gut. It has been shown to control Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis resistant to standard treatment and prevent further flare ups. It is also used in organ transplantation and to treat other diseases affecting the immune system such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or allergic reaction to azathioprine or 6-mercaptopurine (Puri-Nethol) before taking azathioprine. Tell them if you have recently been vaccinated or plan to do so.

Take your azathioprine tablets at least one hour before or three hours after food or milk. Swallow tablets whole with a glass of water. Do not break, chew or crush the tablets.

If you miss a dose of azathioprine, take it as soon as you can if it is within 12 hours of the missed dose. If it is over 12 hours since your missed dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your usual dosing times. Do not take a double dose to make up for the dose that you missed.

Protect yourself from the sun while you are taking azathioprine.

Avoid contact with anyone suffering from chickenpox or shingles. Tell your doctor if you come into contact with anyone who is suffering from chickenpox or shingles.

Store azathioprine tablets out of the reach of children, at room temperature, away from heat, light and moisture.

Your doctor may order regular blood tests while you are taking azathioprine to check how it affects you.

Tell other doctors or dentists that you are being treated with azathioprine before you receive any treatment from them.

Food safety if you have a low immunity

Because you are being treated with azathioprine and have a low immunity you are at a higher risk of getting infections, including those carried by food. Following these simple rules on food safety can help prevent most food borne illnesses.

1. Remember the 4Cs: Clean, Cook, Cover, Chill.
2. **Wash your hands** before preparing or eating food.
3. We will give you a food safety booklet along with this information sheet for you to read.

Other medication

Other drugs interact with azathioprine. Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking other medicine including herbal or complementary products and medicines you can buy without a prescription.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any new medicines.

Pregnancy and breast feeding

Do not take azathioprine if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant or father a child. If you plan to have children discuss this with your doctor before being treated with azathioprine.

It is best to use birth control while being treated with azathioprine. Azathioprine may damage sperm and may be harmful to the baby if used during pregnancy.

Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant while taking azathioprine.

Do not breast feed during treatment.

Side effects

Unfortunately as well as having good effects, most medicines have some effects on your body that are unwanted. These are called *side effects*.

SIDE EFFECTS	WHAT TO DO
<p>Nausea and vomiting may occur after your treatment. Most people have little or no nausea.</p>	<p>It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred, so follow directions closely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of liquids. • Eat often in small amounts.
<p>Your white blood cells may decrease during your treatment. White blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection.</p> <p>When they are low, you are at greater risk of having an infection.</p>	<p>To help prevent infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often and always after using the toilet. • Take care of your skin and mouth. • Avoid crowds and people who are sick. • Call your doctor immediately at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 38°C), chills, cough, sore throat or burning when you pass urine.
<p>Your platelets may decrease during your treatment. Platelets help to make your blood clot when you hurt yourself.</p> <p>You may bruise or bleed more easily than usual.</p>	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not to bruise, cut or burn yourself. • Clean your nose by blowing gently, do not pick your nose. • Avoid constipation. • For minor pain, take paracetamol (e.g. Panadol®). Do not take aspirin or ibuprofen (e.g. Nurofen®) or similar medicines. • Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gum may bleed more easily. Maintain good oral hygiene.

See your doctor or get emergency help immediately if you have:

- Signs of an allergic reaction including skin rash, itching, face swelling or breathing problems.
- Signs of an infection such as fever (over 38°C by an oral thermometer); chills; cough; sore throat; pain or burning when you pass urine; redness, pain or swelling of any area of your body; sores forming anywhere on your body.
- Signs of bleeding problems such as black, tarry stools, blood in urine, pinpoint red spots on skin, extensive bruising.

See your doctor as soon as possible (during office hours) if you have:

- Signs of anaemia such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of liver problems such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stool.
- Signs of kidney problems such as lower back or side pain, swelling of feet or lower legs.
- Severe joint pain or muscle weakness, pain or stiffness.
- Any new marks on your skin or changes to marks that may have been there previously.
- Dizziness, light-headedness or feeling faint.
- Severe abdominal pain.

Check with your doctor if any of the following continue or bother you:

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting or loss of appetite or diarrhoea.
- Easy bruising or bleeding.
- Redness, swelling, pain or sores on your lips, tongue, mouth or throat.
- Skin rash.

Read this leaflet and discuss any questions you have about your medicines with your doctor or pharmacist