

MERCAPTOPURINE

Other names: Puri-Nethol®



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

Mercaptopurine (mer-kap-toe-PYOOOR-een) is a medicine that is used to treat some types of leukaemia. It is a tablet that you take by mouth.

Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or allergic reaction to mercaptopurine before taking mercaptopurine.

Take mercaptopurine at the same time each day on an empty stomach (at least one hour before or two hours after food). Do not take mercaptopurine with milk or milk based products because there is an enzyme in cow's milk that can break down this drug. Tablets must be swallowed whole. Do not chew, break or crush the tablets. Take mercaptopurine exactly as directed by your doctor. Make sure you understand the directions.

If you vomit within one hour of taking mercaptopurine, check with your doctor. You will be told whether to take the dose again or to wait until your next scheduled dose.

If you miss a dose of mercaptopurine, 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. Contact your doctor during office hours to ask about making up the missing dose.

Your doctor may tell you to drink plenty of liquids (8-12 cups or 2,000-3,000 mL a day). This helps prevent kidney problems.

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

A blood test may be taken before each treatment. The dose and timing of your chemotherapy may be changed based on the test results or other side effects.

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

Other medication

Other drugs may interact with mercaptopurine. 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.

Alcohol (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of mercaptopurine.

Pregnancy and breast feeding

It is best to use birth control while being treated with mercaptopurine. Mercaptopurine may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy.

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

Do not breast feed during treatment with mercaptopurine.

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*.

Changes in your blood

This medicine may cause temporary changes in your blood. Your doctor will be following these changes carefully by performing blood tests. Adjustment of your treatment may be needed in certain circumstances.

| EFFECT ON YOUR BLOOD | WHAT TO DO |
|--|---|
| <p>Normal 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. • Avoid crowds and people who are sick. • See your doctor <i>immediately</i> at the first sign of an infection such as fever (a body temperature of 38°C or more using an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine. |
| <p>Normal platelets help your blood to clot normally after an injury.</p> <p>When the platelet count is low you may be more likely to bruise or bleed.</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. • Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily. Maintain good oral hygiene. <p>Some medicines such as aspirin or ibuprofen may increase your risk of bleeding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by a doctor. • For minor pain, try paracetamol first. |

Side effects are listed in the following table in the order in which they may occur. Tips to help manage the side effects are included.

| SIDE EFFECTS | WHAT TO DO |
|--|--|
| Nausea and vomiting can sometimes occur. | You may be given a prescription for an antinausea medicine to take at home. It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred, so follow the directions closely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of liquids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. |
| Your skin may darken in some areas such as your hands, elbows and knees. Your skin may also redden where you have had radiation treatments. | This will slowly return to normal once you stop treatment with mercaptopurine. |
| Hair loss is rare with mercaptopurine. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with mercaptopurine. Colour and texture may change. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a gentle shampoo and soft brush. • Care should be taken with use of hair spray, bleaches, dyes and perms. |

Stop taking mercaptopurine and see your doctor or get emergency help immediately if you have:

- Signs of an **allergic reaction** (rare) soon after a treatment including flushing, fever, rash, itching, dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling or breathing problems.
- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 38°C using an oral thermometer); shaking chills; cough; severe sore throat, productive cough (coughing up thick or green sputum), cloudy or foul smelling urine, painful, tender or swollen red skin wounds or sores.
- 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 **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Signs of **kidney problems** such as lower back or side pain, swelling of feet or lower legs.
- Signs of **gout** such as joint pain.

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

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea.
- 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