

# METHOTREXATE – Once a week

Other names: Trexate®



**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 methotrexate

Methotrexate (meth-oh-TREX-ate) is used to treat severe psoriasis, Crohn's disease or rheumatoid arthritis. In larger doses it is used to treat some types of cancer.

## How does methotrexate work?

Methotrexate may be used for a number of different health conditions. For use in cancer, methotrexate works as an antimetabolite (a medicine which influences how cells in the body grow). For use in inflammatory conditions (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis), methotrexate acts as an immunosuppressant (a medicine which reduces how well the body's immune system works) and helps to prevent a flare up of the inflammatory condition.

## When to take this medicine

It is important to take methotrexate exactly as directed by your doctor. Take the dose with a glass of water while standing or sitting upright. Drink plenty of water (8 cups or 2,000 mL [2 litres]) on the day you take your methotrexate. Do not crush or chew the tablets.

The tablets come in two strengths – 2.5mg and 10mg. Make sure you have the right dose. If your condition is not improving with tablets then you may be changed to an injection.

Your dose will depend on your condition. If treatment is for psoriasis, Crohn's disease or rheumatoid arthritis the dose is usually only taken **once a week**; this dose should be taken on the **same day of the week**.

Folic acid may be prescribed to lessen the side effects (nausea, vomiting) of methotrexate but must be taken on a different day from your methotrexate.

Do not stop taking methotrexate, unless advised by your doctor as your condition may deteriorate after a few weeks.

If you take more tablets of methotrexate than you should, see your doctor or visit the Emergency Department at the hospital as soon as possible (take your medicine container with you to show the doctor or nurse who sees you).

## If you miss a dose

Take your dose as soon as possible except when it is close to the time for your next dose. If it is almost time for next dose, skip the missed dose and return to your regular dosing schedule. You should not take two doses at the same time.

## Precautions with methotrexate treatment

- Avoid drinking alcohol as the risk of liver problems can increase with its use. However, one to two standard drinks once or twice a week is unlikely to cause a problem.
- You must avoid becoming pregnant or fathering a child during treatment and for at least three months after stopping treatment. Contact your doctor at once if you think you have become pregnant.
- Tell your dentist or other health professional that you are being treated with methotrexate before receiving any treatment from them.
- Your skin may sunburn easily. Use a good sunscreen and avoid excessive exposure to sunlight.

## 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*.

Your doctor may carry out regular blood tests while on this treatment. **Do not miss these appointments.**

Call your doctor or get emergency help **immediately** if you have any of these side effects:

- breathlessness, persistent cough, pain or difficulty breathing
- severe allergic reaction: itchy rash, swelling of hands, feet, ankles, face, lips, mouth or throat
- symptoms of an infection: fever, chills or a sore throat
- unexpected bleeding: bleeding gums, blood in urine, unexpected bruising, black tarry stools
- sore mouth, ulcers or blisters inside the mouth or on the tongue
- skin rashes or blistering on other parts of the body (e.g. eyes, nose)
- stomach pain or yellowing of the skin or eyes

Tell your doctor or pharmacist as soon as possible if you have these side effects:

- reduced appetite, feeling or being sick, or vomit after a methotrexate dose, weight loss
- abdominal or loin pain
- diarrhoea
- eye irritation or blurred vision
- dizziness, headaches, drowsiness, tiredness, fits or muscle weakness
- hair loss (not permanent and will grow back)
- worsening of pre-existing arthritis or gout; joint pain
- mental clouding

The list of side effects is **not** complete. Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you notice any other side effects not mentioned in this leaflet.

## Other Medicines

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking any other medicine including herbal or complementary medicines or those you can buy without a prescription.

Methotrexate does not work straight away and may take up to 4 weeks for you to notice any reduced pain, stiffness and swelling. In the meantime other medicines may be used short-term until the methotrexate takes effect e.g.

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs e.g. diclofenac (Voltaren); Ibuprofen (Nurofen). Make sure you do not double up by buying these products from community pharmacies or supermarkets

Care needs to be taken when methotrexate is used with the following medicines:

- Aspirin (can be used safely in low doses)
- Vitamin supplements containing folic acid (not taken on the same day as methotrexate)
- Antibiotics (e.g. trimethoprim, cotrimoxazole) – best to avoid. If prescribed then regular blood monitoring is required
- Retinoids such as acitretin or isotretinoin (used to treat psoriasis and acne) – regular monitoring of the liver function is required

## Storage

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

## Things you can do to take methotrexate safely

- ❖ **Only take your methotrexate once a week (every 7 days)**
  - Choose a day to take your dose
  - You may have serious side effects if you take it more often
- ❖ **Carefully check your tablets**
  - There are two strengths available (2.5mg and 10mg), make sure you take the right dose
- ❖ **Folic acid may reduce side effects**
  - Take on a different day from your methotrexate
  - Discuss with your doctor or pharmacist if you are concerned about any side effects you experience
- ❖ **Let your doctor or pharmacist know immediately if you have**
  - Mouth ulcers, sore throat or fever
  - Stomach pain or yellowing of the skin or eyes
  - Dry cough, chest pain or difficulty breathing
- ❖ **Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of the medicines you are taking**
  - Methotrexate can be harmful when taken with **some** other medicines
- ❖ **Go for all of your tests (e.g. blood tests)**
  - Regular tests are needed to check for side effects

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