

# Diagnostic and Advisory Service for Neuromyelitis Optica

## Patient Information Leaflet

*This information leaflet is designed to answer common questions patients ask about Methotrexate. Further information can be found in the information leaflet supplied by the manufacturer or from your pharmacist or doctor.*

## METHOTREXATE

### What is Methotrexate?

Methotrexate reduces inflammation by slowing down the production of new cells in the body's immune system. It is generally reserved for patients who do not respond, or are intolerant to azathioprine.

Methotrexate is also used in other groups of patients including those with rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, or crohns disease and in much larger doses to treat cancer.

### How long does it take to work?

Methotrexate does not work immediately it can take up to 8 - 12 weeks before you have any benefit. It is important to continue treatment during this time. Methotrexate cannot cure the condition and you may need to take it for several years to keep their symptoms under control.

### What dose do I take?

The Dose will be determined by your doctor. The dose is given **once a week**, on the same day each week. The tablets should be swallowed whole with a glass of water, after food. Do not chew or crush the tablets. Methotrexate is **never** taken every day.

The dose may be changed depending on your response to the medication.

Methotrexate is usually prescribed in 2.5 mg tablets. However it is also available as 10mg tablets. The two strengths are different shapes but are a similar colour. It is important that you keep an up to date record of the dose your child is taking and always check the strength of the tablet you have been given each time you get a new prescription.

You will need some blood tests to check their blood count, liver and kidneys. You may also have a chest x-ray and maybe a breathing test to check how well your lungs are working, especially if you have asthma or another disease, which affects the lungs.

### **What do I do if I miss a dose of Methotrexate?**

If a dose is missed on the normal day, you can take it on one of the two following days. Do not take the dose if it is three or more days late. In the following week give the dose on the **usual** day. Do **not** double up the dose.

### **What do I do if I take too much Methotrexate?**

If you take too much Methotrexate you may need urgent hospital treatment. Make a note of how many tablets you think you have taken and contact your doctor or local accident and emergency department immediately.

### **What are the common side effects?**

Methotrexate can cause sickness, vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of hair and skin rashes. These side effects often occur at the beginning of treatment but settle as you become used to the medication. .

Methotrexate can affect the production of some of the cells in the bone marrow. This can make you more prone to infections, or cause problems with clotting of your blood and wound healing. If you develop a sore throat, mouth ulcers or other infection, or if you have a fever or unexplained bruising or bleeding, you should seek advice from your doctor. It may be necessary for you to have a blood test to check how your body is coping.

Rarely Methotrexate causes inflammation of the lung. If you becomes breathless or develop a dry cough, you should see their doctor immediately.

Most people cope well on methotrexate with very few side effects, however if you are concerned please contact your nurse, doctor or pharmacist

A vitamin supplement called **folic acid** has been shown to help your body cope with the methotrexate and also reduces some of the side effects you may experience

### **Do I need any special checks while on Methotrexate?**

It is important to have your blood checked regularly to check for early signs of changes in the blood. These blood tests show if the medication is working to control the inflammation or if you are developing any side effects. We recommend;

- full blood count including platelets,
- urea and electrolytes
- liver function tests

Initially done every week for 6 weeks,  
monthly for 6 months and then at 2-3 monthly intervals.

The blood tests can be done at the clinic or, with agreement of your GP, at your local surgery. It would also be advisable to file a copy of the reports and bring them along to clinic appointments for review.

You should also show it to your dentist if you are having any dental treatment and to your pharmacist when collecting any prescriptions for you.

### **What do I do if I experience side effects?**

If you experience any signs of illness or side effects such as unexplained bruising, bleeding, sore throat, fever or malaise, contact your nurse, doctor, or pharmacist

If you are in close contact with anyone who has chicken pox or shingles inform your doctor as soon as possible.

### **Can I take other medicines along with Methotrexate?**

It is important that your doctor knows about all the tablets and remedies you take. Some antibiotics affect the way that Methotrexate works. You should not take *Trimethoprim or Co-trimoxazole (Septrin®)* whilst taking Methotrexate.

Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before they take any other medicines, including medicines you may buy over the counter for them such as cold and flu and herbal remedies.

### **Vaccinations**

You should avoid having 'live' vaccines such as polio and rubella. Most travel vaccines and flu vaccines are, safe as they are **not** live vaccinations. Discuss with your doctor or pharmacist first.

### **Alcohol**

It is safe to drink alcohol in moderation whilst on methotrexate, but it may aggravate liver problems.

### **What happens if I need an operation?**

Let the doctor or nurse know so they can advise you what to do about your Methotrexate therapy. Make sure you take the monitoring booklet with you to all appointments and pre-assessment clinics. If you do need an operation, in most cases you will be advised to continue taking the Methotrexate.

### **Is methotrexate OK in pregnancy and breastfeeding?**

It is important not to become pregnant or to father a child whilst taking Methotrexate and for at least 3 months after Methotrexate is stopped, therefore reliable contraception is essential.

**Never give any medications prescribed for you to anyone else**