

Azathioprine

Rheumatology Department Patient Information Leaflet

Please keep this information in a safe place

Introduction

Azathioprine is in a family of drugs called disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs). Whilst your specialist will suggest the drug he feels is best to treat you at the time, based on research and extensive knowledge of the drug, you will always have the choice to discuss other treatment options and alternative therapies.

What is azathioprine?

Azathioprine is used to treat various inflammatory conditions including rheumatoid arthritis.

It is also used to treat less common conditions including systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), dermatomyositis and polymyositis, psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis.

Azathioprine works by slowing down the progression of the arthritis and it helps to dampen down inflammation.

How do I take azathioprine?

Azathioprine is best taken with or just after food. You will usually start on a small dose, which may be increased by your consultant in time, but you must only take the exact dose that has been prescribed for you.

How long will it take for azathioprine to work?

About eight to twelve weeks. There may be a further improvement for up to six months after starting the treatment. You will be given your first prescription from the hospital that will last for four weeks. Further prescriptions should be obtained from your GP.

Will I have any side effects?

Most patients have no side effects. Before you start taking azathioprine, you will need to have a special blood test called a 'TPMT test'. This helps us to predict how your body will respond to azathioprine. If the TPMT result is low, we will not be able to give you azathioprine.

Some people experience nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea when taking this drug. Taking the tablets with food sometimes helps and these symptoms usually settle down in time.

Azathioprine can occasionally cause rashes, bruising, mouth ulcers or sore throat. If you experience any of these side effects, you should tell your consultant or call the rheumatology helpline.

Do I need to have any special tests?

Yes, you will need to have regular blood tests. This is because azathioprine can affect certain blood cells and can sometimes affect the liver so the blood tests will check for this.

You will need to have a blood test every week for the first six weeks and then just once a month, unless you are advised otherwise.

It is your responsibility to have these blood tests and it is important that you do not miss any of them. In order for us to receive the results from your blood tests, you will have to have them at any of the following centres:

Russells Hall Hospital: Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 7.30pm (excluding 12noon to 5pm on Tuesday and 8am to 12noon on Friday) or Saturday, 8am to 10am. No appointments required.

Corbett Hospital: Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.
No appointments required.

Netherton Health Centre: Appointment required, ring 01384 366500.

Cross Street Health Centre: Appointment required, ring 01384 366257.

Ladies Walk Clinic: Appointment required, ring 01902 575103.

Can I take my other medicine with azathioprine?

Azathioprine is not a painkiller so you should continue with your usual painkillers, if necessary. Some drugs can interact with azathioprine so always tell any doctor who is prescribing for you that you are taking it. If you buy any over-the-counter preparations, inform the pharmacist that you take azathioprine.

Can I have immunisation injections?

'Live' vaccines should be avoided. These include immunisations for polio, shingles and rubella (German measles). You can have flu vaccines.

Does azathioprine affect fertility or pregnancy?

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should not take azathioprine. If you are planning a pregnancy or become pregnant, you should discuss this with your specialist as soon as possible.

Can I drink alcohol while taking azathioprine?

You can drink alcohol within reason. We recommend that you stay within the government guidelines which are two to three units a day for women and three to four a day for men (one unit = half a pint of normal strength beer, one glass of wine or one shot/pub measure of spirit).

What alternatives are there to this treatment?

You do not have to take this treatment and can always discuss alternatives with the Rheumatology Department. Some people find that complementary therapy treatment is useful and leaflets about this, provided by Arthritis Research Council, are available in our clinics.

Over-the-counter medications may be used alone or in combination with prescribed medication you are taking; however, you are always advised to discuss these with your consultant before taking them. Medication bought over the counter may help to control your pain but **not always** the condition. Always tell the pharmacist which prescribed medications you are already taking when buying over-the-counter drugs.

Remember, while you are on this medication, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have regular blood tests and it is important that you do not miss any of these tests. If your hospital appointment is rescheduled, contact the rheumatology helpline if you need more blood forms.

Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following:

Arthritis Care

Tel: 0808 800 4050

Website: www.arthritiscare.org.uk

NHS Choices

Website: www.nhs.uk

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Rheumatology helpline on 01384 244789 (this is an answer machine so please do not use this helpline in an emergency)

or speak to your pharmacist

You can download or print this leaflet from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/rheumatology/>

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਰੀਕਾਰਡ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਸਰੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ, 0800 073 0510 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜੀ।

Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm să sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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