

Pharmacy

Azathioprine for inflammatory conditions requiring immunosuppression

Why am I prescribed azathioprine?

This is a drug that affects the immune system in the body. It has been shown to be beneficial in reducing symptoms in patients with immunosuppressive conditions, which has not responded to steroids alone or in patients dependent on high doses of steroids to control their symptoms.

How do I take azathioprine?

It is taken as a tablet that must be swallowed whole with plenty of water.

The exact number of tablets you take will vary depending on your weight and response to treatment. Your doctor will advise you on exactly how many to take.

How long will azathioprine take to work?

It may take between 6 to 12 weeks before you get a good response to azathioprine, so it is important to keep taking the treatment regularly.

Do I need any special checks/tests whilst on azathioprine?

It is important that your doctor can check to see if the treatment is working and also to reduce the side-effects of treatment. In order to do this you will need regular blood tests whilst on the treatment.

The tests you will require are:-

Full blood count (FBC) and liver function tests (LFTs) weekly for two months, then monthly for four months, then three monthly thereafter if stable.

There may be other tests you require on top of these from time to time.

Record the results in the Patient Blood Monitoring Record Book given to you by the hospital doctor/specialist nurse. It is important to bring this book to clinic appointments and to any GP appointments you may have.

Are there any side-effects?

Diarrhoea, nausea and mild aches and pains may occur initially but should settle within two weeks. Other side-effects are more rare.

If the following side-effects occur at any time but particularly if they occur after recently starting treatment or increasing dose, then you should contact your GP, hospital doctor or specialist IBD nurse immediately for further advice.

- feeling generally unwell
- dizziness, headaches, drowsiness
- vomiting
- fever
- muscle and joint pains
- jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)
- skin rashes
- hair loss

Other problems such as reduced bone marrow activity may lead to an increased risk of infections, anaemia.

Special warnings/precautions

- Azathioprine should be avoided if you have previously had an allergic reaction to it or to a similar drug called 6-mercaptopurine.
- If you are considering becoming pregnant or become pregnant whilst on azathioprine, speak to your doctor or specialist nurse as soon as possible.
- **If you develop an infection, fever, chills, fatigue, muscle pain, dizziness, unexplained bruising or bleeding at any time, report these to your GP or specialist nurse immediately (see contact numbers on page 3).**
- You should avoid excessive sunbathing as there are increased risks of skin problems (including skin cancer), whilst you are taking azathioprine. Use a high factor sun screen in the summer.

Are there any problems taking azathioprine with other medication?

- Azathioprine may interact with some other drugs, so it is important that you tell your GP, hospital doctor, specialist nurse and pharmacist about any other tablets you are taking.
- If you are purchasing any drugs over the counter then please tell the pharmacist that you are on azathioprine.
- You should avoid certain types of vaccinations (live vaccines) whilst on azathioprine. Your GP, hospital doctor or specialist nurse will be able to advise you on this.

Further information

This leaflet is only a guide. Further information may be obtained from the manufacturer's patient information leaflet that you will get with the drug and also from your hospital doctor, GP, specialist nurse.

If you have side-effects or problems with your medication you can contact the specialist nurse/doctor at the hospital.

Contact details

- Gastroenterology Helpline
01223 257212
- Rheumatology Helpline
01223 217398
- Pharmacy Medicines Information Helpline (Monday to Friday 09:00 to 17:00)
01223 217502



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For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



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