METHOTREXATE (for inflammatory conditions)

meth-oh-trex-ate

What does it do?

Methotrexate is an immunosuppressant medicine used to treat inflammatory conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease and psoriasis.

Before you start

- Tell your doctor if you have liver, kidney, blood, lung, stomach or gut problems, or diabetes.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. If you or your partner are planning to become pregnant, or find you are pregnant, discuss this with your doctor. Both men and women should use reliable contraception while taking *methotrexate*, and for 3 months after stopping.
- *Methotrexate* weakens your immune system, making it harder for your body to fight infections. You may need tests before you start to make sure you don't have any infections like tuberculosis (TB), HIV, or hepatitis B and C.
- Ask your doctor what vaccines you might need before you start and while you are taking *methotrexate*. You should not have a live vaccine while taking *methotrexate*.

How should you take it?

Take *methotrexate* tablets once a week, on the same day each week. The tablets come in 2.5 mg and 10 mg strengths – make sure you take the right strength. Swallow the tablets whole, with food and a glass of water. Do not break, crush or chew the tablets.
Methotrexate may also be injected under the skin or into a muscle.

Wash your hands after handling *methotrexate*.

What if you forget a dose?

The missed dose can be taken up to a day later. Otherwise, skip the dose and carry on as normal next week. Do not take two doses at the same time.

Can you take other medicines?

Some medicines available without a prescription may react with *methotrexate* including:

- anti-inflammatories, such as diclofenac (e.g. Voltaren®), ibuprofen (e.g. Nurofen®), or aspirin (e.g. Disprin®, in doses used for pain relief). These can also be found in some cold and flu medicines (e.g. Nurofen Cold and Flu®).
- trimethoprim

Tell your pharmacist or doctor about all medicines or treatments that you may be taking, including vitamins (e.g. folic acid), herbal products (e.g. echinacea) or recreational drugs.

What side effects might you notice?

Side Effects	Recommended action
Reduced number of blood cells that fight infections or help your blood to clot - symptoms include: fever, chills, sore throat or generally feeling unwell, or easy or unusual bruising or bleeding Short of breath, persistent dry cough Symptoms of liver problems including: yellow skin or eyes, itching, dark urine, pale bowel motions, abdominal pain	Tell your doctor immediately
Pain, sores, or redness in mouth or on lips	Tell your doctor
Headache, dizziness, changes in vision Hair loss or thinning, skin changes including; rash, itching, lumps or discolouration Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea	Tell your doctor if troublesome

If you notice any other effects, discuss them with your doctor or pharmacist.

Other information:

- You will need regular blood tests while taking *methotrexate* to monitor its effects.
- Protect yourself from too much sunlight while being treated with *methotrexate*. Always cover up and apply a thick layer of broad spectrum sunscreen (at least SPF 30) when outside. Do not use sunbeds.
- Women using *methotrexate* for a long time may need cervical screening more often. Discuss with your doctor.
- It is important to tell anyone who gives you medical or dental treatment that you are taking *methotrexate*.
- Limit your alcohol intake while taking *methotrexate* – discuss this with your doctor.
- You may not notice the effects of *methotrexate* straight away – it can take several weeks before you start to feel better.

This leaflet contains important, but not all, information about this medicine.
Prepared by the MyMedicines Committee at Christchurch Hospital, Te Whatu Ora - Waitaha, New Zealand. March 2023