



Methotrexate Guidelines for Patients

Methotrexate is an effective chemotherapeutic and immunosuppressive medication that has been used for the chronic treatment of psoriasis and other inflammatory disorders for more than 30 years. It treats both the skin and joint manifestations of the disease. Most patients note improvement after one month of treatment and reach a steady state after three.

Methotrexate is taken **only once per week**. It may be taken with or without food.

Levels of methotrexate in the blood can be influenced by the ingestion of other drugs. **Do not take aspirin, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicine [such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), Aleve, or Celebrex], sulfonamides (Bactrim, Septra), tetracyclines, barbiturates, or dilantin, with methotrexate.** You should let your doctor know that you are taking methotrexate when you are prescribed a new medication.

Blood tests to monitor blood cell counts and liver function will be done:

- 1 week after initial test dose (2 pills taken together)
- Every 2 weeks for the first 6 weeks
- 1 week after any dosage changes, then monthly once stable

Avoid excess alcohol consumption as it can increase the risk of liver inflammation.

Folic acid supplements of 1 mg/day should be taken daily as they help prevent some of the gastrointestinal (nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, diarrhea, mouth sores), and hematologic (low blood counts) side effects sometimes seen with methotrexate. However, **do not take folic acid on the day that you take your methotrexate dose** because it may decrease its effectiveness.

Women who can become pregnant must use effective contraception, as methotrexate can affect the development of an unborn child. It also can induce a miscarriage. Men who use methotrexate will have decreased and possibly defective sperm production, and should avoid impregnating a woman while on the medication.

Other side effects may include mild hair loss, headaches, fatigue and dizziness. Sun sensitivity while on methotrexate has been described. Rarer side effects include allergic reaction, redness of palms and soles, and fibrosis of the lungs. Long-term therapy (years) of methotrexate may need evaluation by a gastroenterologist of the overall health of the liver. Chronic liver damage may lead to cirrhosis.