

Azathioprine (Imuran)

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at ndht.pals@nhs.net.

What do the tablets look like?

Azathioprine is available in two strengths – 25mg and 50mg. The 25mg tablets are usually a pale orange colour; the 50mg tablets are usually a pale yellow colour. The colour may vary depending on which brand your chemist stocks.

Why are you taking Azathioprine?

Azathioprine belongs to the group of medicine known as "disease modifying" or "second line agents" used to treat arthritis and inflammatory disease. It suppresses the disease process by reducing the activity of the immune system.

As it is not a "pain reliever" you will not have benefit straight away. It may take up to three months to notice an improvement in your symptoms. You will need to carry on taking your other medication as well.

How to take Azathioprine

The amount you have to take varies from person to person, but it is usually from 50mg to 150mg daily. This dose can be reduced or increased by your rheumatology team.

It is best to take the tablets with, or just after a meal.

What to do if you miss a dose

Do not double up on your next dose. Just continue taking the tablets as directed, but make a note of it and remember to tell your GP on your next visit.

Can you take other medicines and alcohol with the new treatment?

Azathioprine is compatible with most other medicines. Your doctor needs to know if you are taking allopurinol, as this does interact with azathioprine and may need a change in the dose you take. However, always tell your GP that you are taking azathioprine, before any other medicines are prescribed for you.

If you buy medicines "over the counter" at a pharmacy, also tell the pharmacist that you are taking azathioprine.

Alcohol can be taken in moderation.

Contraception and pregnancy

All drugs can potentially affect the unborn child. Men and women of childbearing potential are advised therefore to use a reliable method of contraception during and for three months after treatment. When planning a pregnancy, it is important that both men and women on this drug discuss medication with the Rheumatology Team. This should be at least six months before conception.

Blood monitoring

Your GP will arrange for you to have blood tests after starting treatment. This will be fortnightly for the first 6 weeks, monthly for 3 months and then 3 monthly thereafter. These are blood monitoring guidelines from the British Society of Rheumatology but your GP may feel that your bloods need monitoring more frequently.

Special precautions

All infections should be treated promptly. If you are aware of an infection, arrange to see your GP.

You are advised to keep up to date with the annual flu vaccine and ten-yearly pneumovax. You can arrange to have these at your health centre.

Do not have any live vaccines without first discussing it with your doctor.

Possible side effects

- **Nausea and upset stomach**

If you always take your tablets with a meal, this is less likely. The feeling of sickness usually goes away after a time as your body gets used to the treatment. If the sickness is severe, consult your doctor.

- **Mouth ulcers, sore throat or mouth**

Let the doctor know if there is a problem. If these symptoms occur with fever, chills or sweating, report it to your doctor immediately.

- **Rash, itching anywhere on body**

- **Blood changes**

Regular blood tests are carried out to monitor for changes in your blood.

- **Reduced resistance to infection**

You should avoid close contact with people who have infections such as chickenpox. If you know you have been in close contact with somebody with chickenpox, contact your GP for advice.

If you have noticed any side effects, tell the doctor or nurse promptly.

Further information

If you need more information, or have any problems or have any queries about your medication, please contact your GP or ring:

Rheumatology Advice Line: 01271 322359

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PALS

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Have your say

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'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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