

Taking Methotrexate to help IBD

What is methotrexate?

- Methotrexate is a medication that decreases (suppresses) the activity your immune system. It reduces inflammation, which may relieve the symptoms of inflammatory bowel disease. With less inflammation, you may be able to decrease or stop taking steroid medications such as prednisone.
- Methotrexate can be used as a maintenance medication, to help keep your IBD in remission. It can also be used with Biologic medications (Remicade[®] or Humira[®]) to be more effective and prevent antibodies from developing.
- You may see methotrexate written as MTX.

How do I take this medication?

- Methotrexate is usually given as an injection under the skin (subcutaneous) by your family doctor. Later on, this may be changed to a tablet.
- Take this medication exactly as directed by your doctor. Your doctor may change the dose of methotrexate from time to time.
- This medication works best when taken regularly. It is usually taken weekly, on the same day each week.
- Methotrexate does not work right away. It may be a few weeks before you notice any benefit. It may take 8 to 12 weeks to get the full effect of this medication.
- You may take methotrexate for many months and perhaps several years. Do not stop taking it unless your doctor tells you to, however well you feel.

If you are taking tablets and miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose. Take the next dose at the regular time. Do not take two doses at the same time.

What should I remember when taking methotrexate?

Taking methotrexate increases the chances of getting infections. This is because methotrexate suppresses the immune system, reducing your body's ability to fight infection.

Check with your doctor about vaccinations.

- You can receive vaccinations, as long as the vaccine does not contain a live virus.

These vaccines are live and should be avoided:

- × Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)
 - × Varicella (chicken pox)
 - × Flu mist (live vaccine given as a nasal spray)
 - × Rotavirus
- While taking methotrexate you should have a flu shot (influenza vaccine) each year.

While taking methotrexate:

- You need regular clinic visits and blood tests that monitor your liver, pancreas and blood cell counts. This helps your doctor and nurse check that the medication is working well and not causing serious side effects.
- You may need folic acid, a form of vitamin B that is taken by mouth.
- Do not drink alcohol. When taken together, alcohol and methotrexate can strain your liver.
- Do not take ASA (aspirin, acetylsalicylic acid). Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) for headaches, fever or pain.
- Avoid direct sunlight. When you are outside, wear sunscreen and sunglasses that block ultraviolet (UV) light, a hat and clothing that covers your skin.
- Carry or wear medical alert identification to show that you take methotrexate.



There is no need to stop taking methotrexate before having dental work.

If you or your partner would like to get pregnant, you should not take methotrexate as it is known to cause birth defects. Please discuss this with your doctor.

Important: Methotrexate is known to cause birth effects

- If you are sexually active, you need to use an effective method of birth control.
- Please discuss this with your doctor.

What side effects are possible?

As with all medications, some side effects are possible when taking methotrexate. Some unwanted effects are temporary. They may go away when the dose of methotrexate is lowered.

More common side effects:

- nausea or vomiting
- mouth sores
- fatigue (feeling tired)
- mild headache
- mild skin rash
- your skin is more sensitive to sunlight and may burn easily

Less common side effects:

- thinning hair
- diarrhea

