

GENERIC NAME:

Methotrexate

BRAND NAME:

Rheumatrex



How it works:

- Methotrexate is a disease modifying anti-rheumatic drug (DMARD)
- It suppresses the immune system and prevents or treats the inflammation of rheumatoid, psoriatic and polyarthritis conditions, as well as polymyositis.
- Methotrexate inhibits cell growth and is used to treat psoriasis and cancer in which cells grow faster than normal.

How quickly it works:

- Benefits usually occur within 4 - 8 weeks.
- Your doctor will increase the dosage every 1- 4 weeks until a dosage of 20 to 25 mg is reached to help get your disease and inflammation under control.

How to take:

- Take one day per week by tablet or injection.



Tablet

- Each tablet is provided in *2.5 mg* or *10 mg*.
- The usual starting dose is *10 mg to 15 mg* taken the same day each week.



Injection

- Used to enhance the absorption of methotrexate in the body and to reduce any stomach & bowel upset from tablets taken by mouth.
- May be self-administered into the fat (subcutaneous) tissue of the abdomen, upper outer thighs or back of the arm.
- Liquid methotrexate *with preservative*, in a strength of 25

mg/ml is used.

- Each *.1 ml* on the syringe = *2.5 mg* of methotrexate. The usual starting dose is *10 mg (.4 ml) to 15 mg (.6 ml) weekly*.



If you forget to take the methotrexate: on your weekly scheduled day, take it as soon as you remember. Allow at least 5 days between injections.

Monitoring: Lab tests



- Do blood tests (CBC, AST, albumin, creatinine & ESR) every 4 weeks to monitor the benefit of taking Methotrexate & for side effects
- Once a stable dosage of methotrexate is established, and your inflammation is under control, the blood tests may be reduced to every 6-8 weeks on the advice of your doctor.
- **Do not do lab tests within 24 - 48 hours after taking methotrexate as this may cause a temporary elevated AST.**

Side effects:

Possible side effects are:

- feeling unwell for 24 hours
- nausea, loss of appetite (10% occurrence)
- diarrhea (10%)
- increased sun sensitivity – wear sunscreen regularly
- mouth sores (6-10%)
- hair loss (5%)
- nodules developing over joint areas (10%)

Rare, serious side effects are:

- liver problems, such as increased liver enzymes and possible scarring (fibrosis) (8-38% occurrence)
- low white blood cell counts (<5% occurrence) which may lead to decreased resistance to infections; low platelet counts can increase tendency to bleeding
- lung reactions, such as shortness of breath, fever, dry cough or chest pain may be a sign of inflammation or scarring of lung tissue which is potentially serious (1-5%).

Managing side effects:



Contact your doctor:

- if you experience any of the above signs or symptoms.
- Side effects can occur anytime during treatment and are usually temporary. They are often related to the dosage of methotrexate that you are taking.
- A decrease, or temporary withdrawal of methotrexate, and an increase in frequency of blood testing may be required.

Possible side effects can be reduced by:

- taking folic acid (a B vitamin) of 1 to 2 mg, 6 days/week avoiding the day you take your methotrexate.
- the maximum dose of folic acid is 5 mg/day & requires a prescription from your physician.
- if no reduction in side effects occurs, then your dosage of methotrexate may need to be decreased or held temporarily.

Nausea can be relieved by:

- taking the tablets with food or milk
- dividing the total dose of tablets into 2 to 3 times that day. For example, 2.5 mg at breakfast + 5 mg at supper = 7.5 mg
- taking methotrexate by injection rather than tablets
- taking Gravol 25-50 mg tablets every 4 to 6 hours as needed.



Mouth sores can be relieved by:

- rinsing the mouth with warm water & salt
- applying a nonprescription ointment such as oragel to sores



Precautions:



Alcohol

- drinking alcohol during treatment with methotrexate *is not recommended*, as the combination may increase the risk of liver damage. Limit the amount of alcohol consumed to 1-2 drinks on special occasions only.

Pregnancy

- methotrexate is not to be used by pregnant women or by women or men contemplating conception.
- both men & women should use birth control during methotrexate treatment



- avoid attempting conception for 90 days after stopping methotrexate.

Drug Combinations

- Methotrexate may interact with other medications, and it is important to notify your doctor if you are taking any of the following drugs.
- **Antibiotics:** *trimethoprim* should not be taken with methotrexate. Trimethoprim may lower the amount of the body's folic acid, therefore increasing your risk of side effects from the methotrexate. Often trimethoprim is combined with sulfa medications known under the brand names *Septra, Bactrim, Coptin, Apo-Sulfatrim, Novo-Trimel and Co-Trimoxazole.*
- Other medications such as aspirin or ibuprofen, glyburide to treat diabetes, Phenytoin (Dilantin) used to treat epilepsy, and Probenecid used to treat gout may enhance the effect of your methotrexate.

Illness:



- If experiencing a serious infection (e.g. pneumonia) methotrexate may be held for a few weeks in consultation with your physician.

Surgery:



- Methotrexate may be held during the week of your surgery by your surgeon.
- Develop a plan with your doctor about your arthritis medications & dietary/herbal supplements when having any upcoming surgery, dental work or other procedures.

Storage:

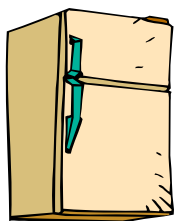


Methotrexate tablets

- Store at controlled room temperature 15-30° C (59-86° F) .
- Do not store in your bathroom as it is a warm, moist area.

Injectable Methotrexate

- Store unopened vials at 15 – 25°C (59-77° F) & protect from light



Care of methotrexate injections:

- Store opened vials in outside shelf of refrigerator at 4° C (39.2° F) and protect from light.
- Preloaded syringes of methotrexate should be refrigerated in a plastic container. If unused, preloaded syringes should be discarded within 4 weeks.
- When travelling put injectable methotrexate in a cool bag with an ice pack.
- Store injectable methotrexate & tablets out of the reach of children.

Who can prepare & give the methotrexate injections?

- Only trained patients, family members or caregivers should handle the methotrexate injections.
- You (or your caregiver) must not handle or give methotrexate if pregnant, trying to have a baby or breastfeeding.

Dealing with large spills of methotrexate (broken vials):

- When preparing injections place syringe, needles & vial on a disposable towel or dish towel (that can be easily washed) to protect your table.
- Keep a special kit in case a spill occurs. The spill kit should include disposable gloves, paper towels & large Ziploc bags.

If spills or sprays occur on the

- **Skin:** wash the affected area gently with plenty of soap & water. Do not scrub as unbroken skin provides protection.
- **Eyes:** flush the eye with plenty of water for at least 10 – 15 minutes. Inform your doctor or local hospital.
- **Clothing:** change clothes immediately & avoid touching the soiled area. Wash separately from other clothing in hot water.
- **Table or floors:** cover the spill with paper towels. Wear protective rubber gloves & discard used paper towels into Ziploc bags. Wash the area with lots hot water & soap. Discard all waste into ziploc bags & then into biohazard container.

Syringe Disposal:

General medication considerations:



Disclaimer:

Accidental Needlestick Injury:

- If a caregiver comes into contact with the needle while preparing or disposing of the syringe it is important to make the puncture site bleed. Wash the area with large amounts of running water & cover with a bandaid.
- Discard the syringe & soiled swab after each injection into a biohazard sharps container obtained from your pharmacist.
- Contact your local pharmacy or hospital to see if they take filled biohazard containers.



1. **Take your medication as instructed by your physician**
Medications are started at low dosages and increased slowly to decrease risk of side effects. Taking more than recommended increases this risk. Skipping doses will decrease the desired effect of the medication.
2. **Keep a diary.**
As a reminder, record when you take your medications & any reasons for changes or withdrawal of medications.
3. **Keep a medication list in your wallet.**
Record of all medications, vitamin/mineral & herbal supplements you are presently taking & any allergies you may have.
4. **Carry a travel letter.**
When travelling with injectable medication & needles, carry a letter from your doctor or clinic indicating the medication & dosage you are taking.

