

ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY EDUCATION



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METHOTREXATE

Name of your medication

Generic name — methotrexate (meh-thuh-TREK-sayt)

Approved uses

Methotrexate is used alone or in combination with other anticancer agents to treat many cancers, including cutaneous T-cell lymphoma, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Methotrexate may be used in treating noncancerous conditions and autoimmune diseases.

Dose and schedule

Taking methotrexate as instructed is important to allow your treatment to be as effective as possible, so here are some key points to remember.

- ☐ Your dose is based on many factors, including your height and weight, overall health, and diagnosis.
- ☐ Methotrexate can be taken with or without food, but at the same time each week.
- ☐ Methotrexate should be taken whole and not crushed, cut, or dissolved. If you are unable to swallow methotrexate, talk to your care provider or pharmacist for possible options.
- ☐ If you miss a dose of methotrexate, **do not** take an extra dose or two doses at one time. Simply take your next dose at the regularly scheduled time. If you miss a dose of this medication, contact your care team for further information.

Drug and food interactions

- ☐ Methotrexate has many drug interactions. Please inform your care providers of all prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal products.
- ☐ Talk with your care provider or pharmacist before taking new medications or supplements, or receiving any vaccines.
- ☐ Avoid live vaccines during treatment with methotrexate

Storage and handling

Handle methotrexate with care. Just like when chemotherapy is given into the vein, this drug can be toxic, and exposure of the drug to others should be limited.

- ☐ Store methotrexate at room temperature (68°F–77°F) in a dry location away from light.
- ☐ Keep methotrexate out of reach of children and pets.
- ☐ Leave methotrexate in the provided packaging until it is ready to be taken.
- ☐ Whenever possible, you should give methotrexate to yourself and follow the steps below. If a family member, friend, or caregiver needs to give the methotrexate to you, they also need to follow these steps.
 1. Wash hands with soap and water.
 2. Put on gloves to avoid touching the medication. (Gloves are not necessary if you give the drug to yourself.)

ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS
NCODA.ORG



METHOTREXATE

3. Gently transfer the methotrexate from its package to a small medicine or other disposable cup.
 4. Administer the medicine immediately by mouth with water.
 5. Remove gloves and do not use them for anything else.
 6. Throw gloves and medicine cup in household trash.
 7. Wash hands with soap and water.
- ☐ If a daily pill box or pill reminder will be used, contact your care team before using:
 - The person filling the box or reminder should wear gloves (gloves are not necessary if you are filling the box or reminder).
 - When empty, the box or reminder should be washed with soap and water before refilling. Be sure to wash hands with soap and water after the task is complete, whether or not gloves are worn.
 - ☐ If you have any unused methotrexate, **do not** throw it in the trash and **do not** flush it down the sink or toilet. Talk to your care provider or pharmacist about proper disposal of methotrexate.
 - ☐ If you are traveling, put your methotrexate's packaging in a sealed plastic bag. Ask your pharmacist if any additional travel precautions are needed.

Side Effects of Methotrexate

Common side effects that have been known to happen in about one third or more of patients taking methotrexate are listed on the left side of this table. You **MAY NOT** experience these side effects. Options to help manage any side effects that do occur are included on the right side of this table. These should be discussed with your care provider. If you experience any side effect you cannot manage or that is not listed here, contact your care provider.

Possible Side Effect	Management
Decreased white blood cells (WBCs) and increased risk for infection	<p>Your WBCs should be monitored by a simple blood test. When your WBCs are low, you are at a greater risk of having an infection. Take the following precautions to protect yourself from infection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wash your hands often, especially before eating and after using the bathroom.• Avoid crowds and people with fevers, flu, or other infection.• Bathe regularly to keep good personal hygiene. <p>Contact your care provider if you experience any signs or symptoms of an infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fever (temperature more than 100.4°F or 38°C)• Chills• Sore throat• Burning with urination• Unusual tiredness• A sore that becomes red, is draining, or does not heal <p>Check with your care provider before taking any medicine for a fever or chills.</p>

ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS
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METHOTREXATE

Serious side effects

- ☐ Methotrexate can cause serious side effects that can be life-threatening. Your doctor may do tests regularly to check how methotrexate is affecting your body. It is important that you remain in your doctor's care while taking methotrexate.
- ☐ Liver problems can occur. Contact your healthcare team if you notice yellowing of the skin or whites of your eyes, dark or brown urine, or unusual bleeding or bruising.
- ☐ Your kidney function will be checked periodically with a blood test. Contact your care team if you notice decreased urination or unusual swelling in your legs and feet.
- ☐ Lung problems can occur. Report any shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- ☐ Severe skin reactions can occur. Report any new rashes.
- ☐ Methotrexate can cause diarrhea and mouth sores. Contact your care team if you experience these.
- ☐ Infertility can occur.
- ☐ Some patients taking methotrexate have experienced tumor lysis syndrome (TLS) when starting treatment. TLS is a condition that occurs when many cancer cells die very quickly and release their contents into the blood, which can damage the kidneys and other parts of the body. Your care provider may give you a medication or do blood tests to check for this side effect.
- ☐ Severe allergic reactions are a rare but serious side effect of methotrexate. Immediately seek medical attention if you notice difficulty breathing, swelling of the mouth or tongue, or a serious rash.
- ☐ There is a low risk that you may develop neurotoxicity. Seek care immediately if you have severe headaches, seizures, confusion, or changes in vision.
- ☐ There is a small risk of developing a second cancer years or months after taking methotrexate. Talk to your provider about this risk.

If you experience ANY uncontrolled side effect, call your physician or healthcare center immediately:

(INSTITUTIONAL CONTACT INFO)

Handling body fluids and waste

Since methotrexate remains in your body for several days after it is taken, some of the drug may be present in urine, stool, sweat, or vomit. Once you have started to take methotrexate, it is important to know the following instructions every day for as long as your treatment lasts. This is to keep yourself, loved ones, and the environment as safe as possible.

- ☐ Pregnant women should avoid touching anything that may be soiled with body fluids from the patient.
- ☐ Toilet and septic systems
 - You may use the same toilet, septic tank, and/or sewer that you usually use. If you have a low-flow toilet, close the lid and flush twice to ensure all waste has been discarded.
 - If the toilet or toilet seat becomes soiled with urine, stool, or vomit, clean the surfaces before other people use the toilet.
 - Wash hands with soap and water after using the toilet.

ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS
NCODA.ORG



METHOTREXATE

- ☐ If you need a bedpan, be sure your caregiver knows to wear gloves to assist with cleanup and to wash the bedpan with soap and water every day.
- ☐ If you do not have good control of bladder or bowels, use a disposable pad with a plastic back, a diaper, or a sheet to absorb body waste.
- ☐ Wash any skin that has been exposed to body waste or methotrexate with soap and water.
- ☐ Linens or clothing that are soiled with body fluids or body waste should be washed separately from other linens and clothing. If you do not have a washer, place the soiled linens in a plastic bag until they can be washed.
- ☐ Wash hands with soap and water after touching linens or clothing that may be soiled with body fluids.

Pregnancy, sexual activity, and contraception

- ☐ Women should not become pregnant and men should not get a partner pregnant while taking methotrexate. Men and women of childbearing age and potential should use effective contraception during therapy and for a minimum of three months for men, and six months for women, after the last dose of methotrexate.
- ☐ Effective contraception could include one or more of the following: oral contraceptive, barrier methods, etc.
- ☐ Do not breastfeed while taking methotrexate and for one week after the last dose of methotrexate.
- ☐ Please inform your care provider if you become pregnant or plan to have a baby after taking methotrexate.
- ☐ It is safe to hug and kiss. Special precautions may be needed for sexual activity while on oral chemotherapy, and you are encouraged to ask your care provider.

Obtaining medication

- ☐ Talk with your care provider about the process for obtaining your methotrexate.

_____ (PHARMACY OR SPECIALTY PHARMACY CONTACT INFO)

Additional resources

Product prescribing information: https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2016/008085s066lbl.pdf

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Additional instructions

ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS
NCODA.ORG



METHOTREXATE

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