

Ihotaudit

Patient instructions, Methotrexate

Trade names: Trexan, Metoject, Methotrexat®

Indications and mode of action

Methotrexate is used as an immunosuppressive medicine, which means that it calms down the immune system. It is used to treat skin and arthritic psoriasis as well as many other inflammatory skin conditions. Methotrexate is also used to treat rheumatic diseases. In cancer, methotrexate can be used in large doses as a cytostatic medicine.

The small doses used for skin conditions reduce inflammation.

Dosage

Methotrexate therapy is usually started with weekly doses of 7.5–10 milligrams. Any increases or decreases in dosage are individual and they must always be done according to your physician's orders. Usually the maximum dose used for skin conditions is 25 mg per week. Methotrexate can be given as tablets (2.5 mg or 10 mg) or as subcutaneous injections (various doses). Methotrexate is taken only once a week, always on the same day of the week and preferably also at the same time.

If you are started on the tablet medication, take them with plenty of water and preferably with a meal. If you're started on injected methotrexate, you will be taught how to inject it yourself.

The response will be seen 1 to 3 months after starting the treatment at the earliest. The treatment may continue for years.

Folic acid

You will need to use folic acid together with methotrexate. It is also taken once a week. The dosage of folic acid is always 5 mg as a single dose and you need to take it 6 to 24 hours after taking methotrexate. Methotrexate causes folic acid depletion, which is why you need to take additional folic acid. Folic acid also helps with any nausea and it protects the liver. Folic acid is available in 1 mg tablets (Folvite®, Foliver®) and as 5 mg tablets manufactured by Yliopiston apteekki, among other brands.

Adverse effects

The majority of patients experience no adverse effects from methotrexate. Most common adverse effects include nausea and other gastrointestinal problems, especially in the beginning of the treatment. They can be avoided by using injected methotrexate. Adverse effects to the liver (increased liver function levels in blood tests) are also quite common, but seldom serious. You should avoid using alcohol during the treatment to avoid harm to the liver. Any changes in the blood count are rare. Some patients may experience headaches or tiredness. Inflammation in the mouth, hair loss, and diarrhea may rarely occur.

A serious but very rare adverse effect is a disturbance in lung function. Its symptoms include cough and shortness of breath. If this occurs, the medication must be stopped and you must contact your treating physician. Contact the unit responsible for your care if you experience bruises or bleeding without any clear cause. Your blood count must be checked if such symptoms occur.

Methotrexate therapy may weaken the immune system and you should pause methotrexate during difficult infections with fever. You do not need to pause methotrexate if you have a common cold.

For major dental procedures, such as root canal treatment or tooth extraction, you should pause the methotrexate and take additional antibiotics, prescribed by your dentist. Let your dentist know that you are taking methotrexate. For other minor procedures, you may continue methotrexate medication. If a surgical operation is planned for you, check with the unit responsible for your care if you should pause methotrexate. Methotrexate does not increase the risk for cancer.

Interactions with other medications

Methotrexate may have interactions with other medicines, such as antibiotics. Always tell your doctor that you are taking methotrexate. According to current knowledge, anti-inflammatory analgesics may be taken during methotrexate therapy, but they should be taken at a different time of the day. You may take stomach protectors as usual.

Vaccinations

We recommend that you take a vaccine for pneumococcus before your treatment begins and the annual influenza vaccine. If methotrexate is the only immunosuppressive medicine that you use, you may take vaccines as usual without the need to pause methotrexate.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Methotrexate cannot be used if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Women taking methotrexate must use reliable contraceptives, a condom is not enough. Let your treating physician know if you are planning to get pregnant. Using methotrexate during pregnancy may cause fetal death and severe birth defects. When planning to get pregnant, women must continue to use contraceptives for three months after stopping methotrexate. Men do not need to stop using methotrexate when trying to conceive.

Methotrexate cannot be used if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Follow-ups

Methotrexate treatment requires checking laboratory tests regularly. Your blood count as well as liver and kidney function levels need to be checked during the therapy. The laboratory tests will be taken three, six and 12 weeks from starting the therapy, and then every three to four months. Tests will be also checked if it is necessary to increase the dosage.

Your physician will contact you only if there is something abnormal in the test results. For the treatment to be safe, it is absolutely necessary that you have the laboratory tests taken.

If you cannot attend the planned tests, it is not safe to continue the treatment and it may have to be discontinued.

We will schedule the follow-up tests at your appointment at the Skin and Allergy Hospital, and the tests will be taken at a HUSLAB laboratory. You can eat and drink normally before the blood tests.

Book an appointment for the lab tests online at www.huslab.fi

Contact the unit responsible for your care if necessary.

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