

Patient Information Regarding Use of Methotrexate

You have been prescribed methotrexate. This medication is used to help induce remission (controlling the symptoms of your disease) and when there is a continuing need for the use of Prednisone (which has many more side effects than methotrexate). This medication typically works slowly and you may not see results for several months (3 to 6 months).

This medication can cause side effects that may be permanent and it is important for you to know about these so, you can report them to your treating physician.

The major side effects may include:

- Stomatitis (inflammation and pain of the mucus membranes of the mouth) may occur and is usually prevented by taking Folic acid 1 mg daily.
- Nausea may also be avoided by taking Folic acid 1 mg daily.
- Diarrhea
- Hair loss
- Mild decrease in the white blood cell count (leukopenia). This may be more severe in patients taking sulfa medications, azathioprine or 6-mercaptopurine.
- Elevation of liver enzymes sometimes occurs and rarely hepatic fibrosis (scarring of the liver). Patients who are obese or who drink alcohol have an increased risk of hepatic fibrosis.
- Cough and shortness of breath may be a sign of a rare, but serious side effect called interstitial pneumonitis (scarring pneumonia). This requires an immediate stopping of the methotrexate and treatment with Prednisone.
- Women of childbearing ability must be on effective contraception because methotrexate is strongly teratogenic (can cause birth defects) and abortifacient (can cause miscarriage).

Methotrexate is usually given at a dose of 25mg given intramuscularly once a week for 16 weeks. The dose is then reduced to 15mg intramuscularly once a week for one or more years. In patients who have inflammatory bowel disease or rheumatoid arthritis it is not standard practice to do liver biopsies. Patients with psoriasis have an increased risk of developing scarring of the liver and thus, it is recommended they have liver biopsies after they have taken 1.5, 3 and 5 grams of methotrexate.