

## **Patient Information Regarding Use of Thioguanines**

You have been prescribed one of the thioguanine medications (**Imuran** or **Purinethol**). These medications are used to help induce remission (control the symptoms of your disease) and when there is a continuing need for the use of Prednisone (which has more side effects than the thioguanines). These medications typically work slowly and you may not see results for several months (3 to 6 months).

These medications can cause side effects (that typically resolve when the medication is stopped) and it is important for you to know about these so, you can report symptoms to your treating physician.

*The major side effects include:*

- Nausea is common in the first few weeks of treatment but, gradually subsides.
- Fever, skin rash and joint pains may occur (2% incidence) within the first few weeks.
- Pancreatitis occurs in 3 to 7% of patients, usually within the first month and maybe suspected with the onset of nausea and/or indigestion. Pain in the upper abdomen that radiates to the back may also occur. Elevation of your serum amylase and lipase confirms the diagnosis and the thioguanine must be stopped and cannot be used again.
- Drug-induced hepatitis with elevation of liver enzymes occurs about 9% of the time and may be a reason to discontinue treatment.
- Cholestatic hepatitis (elevation of both the liver enzymes and the bilirubin) is more serious and may produce jaundice (yellow coloration of the eyes and skin) but, occurs less than 1% of the time. Treatment must be stopped if this occurs.
- Bone marrow suppression may occur in approximately 4% of patients, particularly with a decrease in the white blood cells. The red blood cells and platelets may also decrease. If this happens, the medication should be stopped for several weeks, then resumed at a lower dose.
- Infections may occur in 1.8% of patients, especially those also taking Prednisone. Some of these infections may be serious and require stopping the drug.
- The issue of whether or not these medications cause lymphoma (cancer of the lymph nodes) is unresolved. The number of patients who have developed lymphoma while on these drugs is exceedingly small and it is not certain whether the patients would have developed lymphoma despite the inflammatory bowel disease or the use of thioguanines. Certainly, in most patients who require the thioguanines the benefits of the medication far outweigh the risk of developing lymphoma.

During treatment with these medications, you will be monitored carefully with blood tests, particularly in the early part of the treatment. Because some of these side effects can occur at any time, it will be necessary to monitor you at regular intervals the entire time you are on therapy, even for several years. You will have regular determinations of your CBC (complete blood count) and liver enzymes. If you develop any of the symptoms mentioned above, please report them to you physician as soon as possible.