

# Patient Instruction Sheet

## Methotrexate

*Methoblastin, Ledertrexate*

### Why you have been prescribed Methotrexate

Methotrexate is a medication that works by suppressing your body's defence system (immune system). It is used for many different types of illnesses including Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Multiple Sclerosis is a disease that affects your immune system, and in some cases medications that suppress the immune system have been shown to have some benefit for people with MS.

### How to take Methotrexate

Methotrexate comes in 2.5mg or 10mg tablets. You must be very careful not to confuse the tablets.

Methotrexate 2.5mg tablets are round, pale yellow tablets marked with "M 2.5" on one side.

Methotrexate 10mg tablets are a pale yellow oval shaped tablet marked with "M10" on one side and a score line on the other.

The effective dose varies from person to person so please see overleaf for your dosage schedule. The dose you have been prescribed depends on the results of the blood test you had before starting the Methotrexate treatment. In the future, your dose may change depending on blood results.

Methotrexate can be taken with or without food. Take the tablet with a glass of water while you are sitting. Swallow the tablet whole and do not crush or chew it.

**Methotrexate should be taken only on the same day each week. It is very important you remember to take Methotrexate on this day only.**

**Methotrexate should always be given with folic acid (a type of vitamin B) 5 mg every day, except Monday, to reduce side effects.**

*These medications are strong and dangerous when not taken correctly, so it is important to keep them well out of reach of children and away from where they could be confused with other medication. Store them at room temperature and avoid handling the tablets too much.*

## Side effects

- Most people who take Methotrexate have few or no side effects. However some do, and they most commonly include nausea, diarrhoea and feeling unwell.
- Less common side effects you may experience include hair loss, rash and sores in the mouth and on the lips, and sensitivity to light.
- Methotrexate can also cause some liver damage. If you notice any discolouration of your skin and/or eyes, itchy rash, abdominal pain, or any severe nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, you must contact your local doctor immediately.
- Methotrexate can affect the bone marrow (where blood is made) and may lead to anaemia and an increased risk of infections and bruising due to changes in the blood. If you have signs of infection (including fever, chills or sore throat), contact your local doctor as early as possible. You also need to see your doctor if you come into contact with anyone with chicken pox or shingles, as you may need special treatment.

*For people with MS this is particularly important for those who are prone to bladder infections. If you notice any increasing frequency in urination, burning sensation or smelling urine you need to seek treatment from your local doctor promptly.*

The folic acid tablets you have been prescribed by your doctor may help reduce some of the side effects.

## Rare but serious side effects

**Immediately contact your doctor or emergency department at your local hospital** if you observe any of the following symptoms, as you may be having a serious reaction to Methotrexate:

- chest pain, difficulty breathing or a dry, persistent cough
- swelling of lips/mouth
- vaginal inflammation or ulcers
- unexplained skin rash
- severe and continuing diarrhoea, vomiting or stomach pain

## Why you need regular blood tests

Before you start taking Methotrexate and at regular intervals while you are taking Methotrexate, your doctor will ask you to have regular blood tests. These blood tests assist in monitoring your immune system and the function of your liver, kidneys and lungs. It is important that you ensure you have these blood tests and keep a record of when you have had them.

When you first start taking Methotrexate you will need to have a blood test:

- before you start, and one week after your first dose;
- every week for the first month
- every month for the next 6 months and then every 1-2 months for the rest of the time you are taking the medication.

## Important things to be aware of

**Do not take medications Bactrim, Septrin or Trimethoprim in combination with Methotrexate, as these can have fatal consequences.**

- You must not stop taking Methotrexate without checking with your doctor first.
- You **MUST** tell your doctor if you become pregnant or are trying to become pregnant, are breast-feeding or planning to breast-feed or are planning to father a child.
- You and your partner must use a reliable method of contraception during and for three months after treatment with Methotrexate. Treatment with Methotrexate increases the risk of genetic abnormalities. It can also damage the baby if taken by a woman during pregnancy.
- You **MUST NOT** have any immunisations or vaccinations without your doctor's approval. **Avoid live vaccines/immunisations, especially Polio, Rubella and BCG.**
- You should try and avoid regular contact with people who have infectious disease such as flu, chickenpox or Herpes Zoster.
- You should always tell your doctor about any other medications you are taking including vitamins, natural remedies or herbal products. This includes over the counter medications such as Aspirin, Panadeine, Nurofen and medicines for coughs, colds and flu. Panadol is safest if you have pain.
- Drinking alcohol is not advisable while taking Methotrexate. The occasional small amount of alcohol may not be expected to cause significant side effects.

## Your dosage schedule for Methotrexate

Dosage period – WEEKLY	Comments
_____ to _____	
_____ to _____	
_____ to _____	
_____ to _____	
_____ to _____	

*If you think that you or anyone else may have taken too much Methotrexate, immediately go to Accident and Emergency at your nearest hospital. Do this even if there are no signs of discomfort or poisoning.*

## Record of blood tests

Date of blood test	Where blood test was taken	Doctor notified

*Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the information given in this information sheet is up to date and accurate, not every person will respond the same way to this medication. This instruction sheet is meant as a guide only. More comprehensive information can be found in the insert provided in the package and from your local pharmacist*