



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



Department of Rheumatology

## Methotrexate

### Patient Information Sheet

#### Why am I prescribed Methotrexate?

Methotrexate is used to treat several different types of rheumatic diseases including rheumatoid arthritis and psoriatic arthritis. Methotrexate can reduce inflammation by reducing the activity of the immune system, so it is always used with care.

#### When do I take Methotrexate?

Methotrexate is usually taken in tablet form **once a week on the same day**. It should be taken with food. The tablets should be swallowed whole and not crushed or chewed.

#### How long will Methotrexate take to work?

Methotrexate does not work immediately. It may be 6–12 weeks before you notice any benefit.

#### What dose should I take?

Methotrexate tablets are available in 2.5mg and 10mg doses. **These tablets are very similar in appearance so you should always check the dose is correct.**

Your doctor will advise you what dose you should take. Usually you will start on a low dose (for example 7.5mg or 10mg a week). Your doctor may then increase this depending on your disease progression. Methotrexate is not a painkiller. So if you are on a painkiller you may continue to take this as well as Methotrexate, unless your doctor advises otherwise

#### What are the possible side effects?

In some patients Methotrexate can cause a feeling of sickness, diarrhoea, mouth ulcers, hair loss and skin rashes.

Taking Methotrexate can affect the blood count (one of the effects is that fewer blood cells are made) and can make you more likely to develop infections. If you develop a **sore throat** or **other infection**, or if you have a **fever**, if you develop **unexplained bruising or bleeding**, or if you develop any **new symptoms** after starting Methotrexate you should see your doctor.

Rarely Methotrexate causes inflammation of the lung with breathlessness. If you become **breathless**, you should see your doctor immediately.

While taking Methotrexate you should avoid direct sun light and the use of tanning beds. You should use SPF 30 or higher when out in the sun. There have been rare reports of lymphomas and other malignancies in patients who have been treated with Methotrexate.

If you have not had chickenpox but come into contact with someone who has chickenpox or shingles, or if you develop chickenpox or shingles while you are taking Methotrexate, you should see your doctor immediately as you may need special treatment.

Most doctors prescribe folic acid tablets to patients who are taking Methotrexate as this can reduce the likelihood of side effects.

### **Do I need any special checks while on Methotrexate?**

Because Methotrexate can affect the blood count and sometimes cause liver problems, your doctor will arrange for you to have regular blood checks while taking this drug.

You may be asked to keep a record booklet with your blood test results. Bring this with you when you visit your GP or the hospital

### **Can I take other medicines along with Methotrexate?**

Some drugs interact with Methotrexate so you should always let any doctor treating you know that you are taking Methotrexate.

Special care is needed with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. You may only take anti-inflammatory drugs if your doctor prescribes them for you.

Do not take 'over the counter' preparations without discussing this first with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Do not take drugs containing trimethoprim (for example septrin).

### **Can I have vaccinations while on Methotrexate?**

It is recommended that you should not be immunised using any of the 'live' vaccines such as polio, rubella and yellow fever. An 'inactivated' polio vaccine can be given instead of the 'live' polio vaccine and the inactivated version should be also given to people you are in close contact with such as members of your household. If you are on Methotrexate you should avoid contact with children who have been given the 'live' polio vaccine for 4-6 weeks after vaccination. Yearly flu vaccines and pneumovax are safe and recommended. You should not take your methotrexate for 2 weeks after the flu vaccine.

### **Does Methotrexate affect fertility or pregnancy?**

Methotrexate may result in a reversible decrease in fertility. Pregnancy should be avoided while you are taking this medication. Once Methotrexate had been stopped both women and men must wait at least 3 months before trying to conceive.

If you are planning a family, or if you become pregnant while taking Methotrexate, you should discuss this with your doctor as soon as possible.

Taking Methotrexate is contraindicated while breastfeeding.

### **May I drink alcohol while taking Methotrexate?**

If you drink alcohol you should only drink it in small amounts because Methotrexate and alcohol can interact and damage your liver. Discuss this with your doctor.

### **Contact Details**

Dr. S. Harney, Consultant Rheumatologist ( <i>secretary</i> ):	(021) 4922422
Dr. J. Ryan, Consultant Rheumatologist ( <i>secretary</i> ):	(021) 4922468
Dr. G. Murphy, Consultant Rheumatologist ( <i>secretary</i> ):	(021) 4922468
Louise Murphy, Candidate ANP in Rheumatology:	(021) 4920266
Joan Swan, Clinical Nurse Specialist in Rheumatology:	(021) 4922645
Davida Hehir, Clinical Nurse Specialist in Rheumatology:	(021) 4234511

### **Always remember!**

**Check the dose of your Methotrexate tablets printed on the medicine container. Keep all medicines out of reach of children. Please note that this information leaflet does not list all the side effects of Methotrexate. Always read the drug information leaflet which comes with your medicine.**