



Oral methotrexate for children and young people

An information guide for patients, parents and carers

The purpose of this guide is to give information on the use of oral methotrexate in children and young people with cancer.

Please read this guide carefully alongside any patient information provided by the manufacturer. We have written this guide to give you more information about the use of this medicine in children and young people. Keep it somewhere safe so you can read it again.

What is methotrexate?

Methotrexate is a chemotherapy medicine commonly used in the treatment of certain types of cancer and leukaemia.

What preparations of methotrexate are available?

Methotrexate is available as 2.5mg tablets and 10mg tablets. A liquid is available which contains methotrexate 10mg/5ml.

Where can I get methotrexate from?

Methotrexate must only be obtained from the hospital at which you/your child is being treated. Please remember to bring all medication with you at each hospital visit.

How is methotrexate given?

Methotrexate is given by mouth **once a week**, on the same day each week. Instructions will be on the label or on the patient dosing information chart.

For patients taking mercaptopurine and methotrexate, these medicines can be given at the same time. **Always remember that methotrexate must only be given once a week.** Methotrexate should not be given in the weeks when you/your child is having intrathecal methotrexate.

The tablets should be swallowed whole with plenty of water or juice. Methotrexate can be taken with or without food. Do not break, crush or chew the tablets. Once the full dose has been swallowed, a glass of water should be drunk to remove any methotrexate residue from the mouth.

Liquid medicine should be measured in an oral syringe through a bung/stopper in the neck of the bottle (supplied by pharmacy). Your hospital will explain how to measure liquid medicine using a syringe and how to dispose of the syringe after use.

Do not take co-trimoxazole (Septrin®) on the same day as methotrexate.

Are there any possible side effects?

It is important to remember that everyone reacts differently to chemotherapy. Some will have very few side effects whilst others will have more. The side effects listed below will not affect everyone who is given methotrexate and may be different if more than one chemotherapy drug is given.

What are the common side effects?

Itchy eyes

Methotrexate can cause red, itchy eyes. If this happens contact your hospital team for advice.

What are the less common side effects?

Temporary effect on liver function

Methotrexate can cause some changes to liver function. This should return to normal when the treatment is finished. Blood tests may be taken to monitor liver function (called LFTs – liver function tests). If there is pain on the right side of the abdomen, yellowing of the skin and eyes, or signs of bruising or bleeding, contact your hospital team for advice.

Temporary effect on kidney function

Methotrexate can cause changes to kidney function. This should return to normal when the treatment is finished. If the kidney function is seriously affected, then treatment will be changed. Blood tests will be taken to monitor kidney function before starting treatment and during treatment. Kidney function will be tested using a GFR (glomerular filtration rate) test.

Mouth ulcers

If you/your child's mouth becomes sore or small ulcers develop, contact your hospital team. Always follow the advice from your hospital on how to take good care of you/your child's mouth before and during treatment.

Is there anything else I should know about or do?

Contact the hospital at which you/your child is being treated if:

- a dose of methotrexate is forgotten
- vomiting occurs after taking the dose
- too much methotrexate is given

Which tests/investigations may take place before, during or after treatment with methotrexate?

Full blood count

A full blood count will be done regularly at your hospital or by your community team. The dose of methotrexate may need to be adjusted according to the result. The new dose will be recorded on the label or on the patient dosing information chart. Alternatively, you may be telephoned with the new dose.

Does methotrexate interact with any other medicines?

Some medicines can affect how well methotrexate works. Always tell the prescriber about any other medication that is being taken. Make sure, and check with the doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medicines. This includes supplements, herbal and complementary medicines.

How should the medicine be handled and stored?

- keep out of reach and sight of children
- store the tablets and liquid at room temperature
- keep out of direct sunlight
- methotrexate liquid has a 12-week expiry once opened so ensure you write the date opened on the bottle
- always handle these medicines with care – handle as little as possible and always wear gloves
- if you are pregnant or think you could be pregnant, please discuss handling instructions with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist

Any methotrexate that has not been given, or is out of date, must be returned to the hospital at which you/your child is being treated. **Do not throw away at home.**

Please read the CCLG factsheet – safe handling of chemotherapy medicines

Pregnancy

If you are sexually active while taking anti-cancer medicines or drugs, it is important that you use contraception such as condoms, the pill or coil to avoid pregnancy. You may need to take a pregnancy test to confirm you are not pregnant before taking this medicine. Contraception should continue for a while after treatment finishes. Your team will advise how long you should continue contraception for.

Fertility

Depending on the type, dose and combination of medicines given during your treatment, it is possible that fertility may be affected. For girls, this means that it may be harder for them to become pregnant in the future. For boys, this may mean that their sperm is less fertile which can affect their chance of having children in the future.

If you would like more information about this please discuss with you/your child's medical team.

If you have any questions about methotrexate, please contact the hospital at which you/your child is being treated. This guide only gives general information.

Always discuss individual treatment with your/your child's medical team. Do not rely on this guide alone for information about treatment.



USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG)

publishes a variety of free resources to order or download
www.cclg.org.uk

Young Lives vs Cancer offers practical support to children and young people with cancer and to their families

www.younglivesvscancer.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support offers support and advice to those affected by cancer.

www.macmillan.org.uk

EMC (Electronic Medicines Compendium) offers up to date, approved and regulated information for licensed medicines.

www.medicines.org.uk



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 ChildrensCLG   CCLG_UK

Registered charity in England and Wales (1182637)
and Scotland (SC049948).

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This edition: January 2023

Next review date: January 2026



With thanks to Ghazala Javid, Senior Paediatric Oncology & Haematology Pharmacist, University Hospitals of Leicester and the Neonatal and Paediatric Pharmacists Group (NPPG) paediatric oncology pharmacists steering committee who reviewed this factsheet on behalf of the CCLG Information Advisory Group, comprising multi-professional experts in the field of children's cancer.

Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG) is a leading national charity and expert voice for all childhood cancers.

Each week in the UK and Ireland, more than 30 children are diagnosed with cancer. Our network of dedicated professional members work together in treatment, care and research to help shape a future where all children with cancer survive and live happy, healthy and independent lives.

We fund and support innovative world-class research and collaborate, both nationally and internationally, to drive forward improvements in childhood cancer. Our award-winning information resources help lessen the anxiety, stress and loneliness commonly felt by families, giving support throughout the cancer journey.

Our work is funded by donations. If you would like to help, text 'CCLG' to 70085 to donate £3. You may be charged for one text message at your network's standard or charity rate. CCLG (registered charity numbers 1182637 and SC049948) will receive 100% of your donation.

We are grateful to all those who have contributed to this publication. We make every effort to ensure that this information is accurate and up to date at the time of printing. CCLG does not accept any responsibility for information provided by third parties including those referred to or signposted to in this publication. Information in this publication should be used to supplement appropriate professional or other advice specific to your circumstances.

If you have any comments on this factsheet, please contact us at publications@cclg.org.uk. CCLG publications on a variety of topics related to children's cancer are available to order or download free of charge from our website.