



# LUPUS MEDICINES

## IMMUNOSUPPRESSANTS: AZATHIOPRINE (IMURAN)

### Questions answered:

**What are immunosuppressants?**

**How does azathioprine work?**

**What are the benefits of taking azathioprine for a person with lupus?**

**How long does azathioprine take to work?**

**How do you take azathioprine?**

**What do you do if you forget to take your azathioprine?**

**What are the side effects of azathioprine?**

**How do you use azathioprine safely?**

**When should you call your doctor?**

### What are immunosuppressants?

- In lupus and other autoimmune diseases, instead of protecting the body from viruses and other invaders, the body's immune system attacks healthy tissue. Immunosuppressant medications decrease the amount that the body fights against healthy tissue.

### How does azathioprine work?

- One way azathioprine, sold under the brand name Imuran, works is by decreasing the production of immune cells.

### What are the benefits of taking azathioprine for a person with lupus?

- Azathioprine has been shown to decrease side effects of lupus and help improve kidney function in lupus patients with kidney problems.
- The drug is steroid-sparing, therefore patients are often able to lower the amount of steroids they are on. This can reduce the side effects that often come along with steroid usage.

### How long does azathioprine take to work?

- The effects of azathioprine can often be felt 3 months after beginning the medicine, however this can vary.

### How do you take azathioprine?

- Azathioprine can be taken as a tablet, injection, or an infusion.
- The dosage each person receives is based on their weight.

### **What do you do if you forget to take your azathioprine?**

- If you miss a dose of azathioprine, take it as soon as you remember and then again at the previously scheduled time.
- If it is close to the next dose, take only that dose. Do not take a higher dosage at one time to make up for a missed dose.

### **What are the side effects of azathioprine?**

- Most common and serious side effects involve the stomach and blood cells. Nausea and vomiting can occur, sometimes with stomach pain and diarrhea. Taking the medication with food may help to reduce these symptoms.
- Imuran can also decrease the number of certain cells in your blood. For this reason, blood tests should be done regularly to determine your white blood cell, platelet, and red blood cell count.
- Less common side effects include liver test abnormalities, inflammation of the liver or, pancreas or you could have an allergic reaction that can seem like the flu. During treatment, your doctor may perform tests to help monitor how your body is reacting to the drug.

### **How do you use azathioprine safely?**

- Have regular blood tests
- Always wear sunscreen and limit prolonged exposure to sunlight
- Talk with your doctor if you are pregnant, breast-feeding or are planning a pregnancy.
- Talk to your doctor before planning any surgery or vaccination.

### **When should you call your doctor?**

- Temperature greater than 100.5, chills, or night sweats.
- Continued cough, increased sputum, colored sputum, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chest pain, chest tightness, wheezing.
- Bruising or bleeding without an obvious reason.
- Started any new medicine.

**Be sure to talk to your rheumatologist if you have any other questions or concerns.**