



LUPUS MEDICINES

IMMUNOSUPPRESSANTS: METHOTREXATE

Questions answered:

What are immunosuppressants?

How does methotrexate work?

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

How long does methotrexate take to work?

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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 methotrexate work?

- One way methotrexate works is by decreasing the production of immune cells.

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

- Methotrexate treats joint pain and swelling in lupus patients. It can also treat the butterfly rash on the face (called malar rash). It is sometimes used to treat inflammation around the heart (called pericarditis) or around the lungs.

How long does methotrexate take to work?

- The effects of methotrexate can often be felt 3-6 weeks after beginning the drug, however the full benefits may take up to three months.

How do you take methotrexate?

- As pills or a liquid one time a week with daily vitamin folic acid tablet.
- As an injection one time a week under the skin or into the muscle with daily vitamin folic acid tablet.

What do you do if you forget to take your methotrexate?

- If you miss a dose of methotrexate, take it as soon as you remember and then exactly weekly after that. For example, if you took methotrexate every Sunday, and one week you forgot and didn't remember until Tuesday, then you would take your normal dosage on Tuesday and every Tuesday after that.

What are the side effects of methotrexate?

Common side effects: Nausea, stomach upset and loose stools, soreness of the mouth and mouth sores, fatigue, sun sensitivity, skin rashes, and hair loss. Folic or folinic acid helps to limit these side effects. Sometimes the person who has rheumatoid nodules may notice a few more or a change in the size of nodules.

Possible serious side effects:

- Liver damage - Worsening inflammation and damage in patients with viral hepatitis. Abnormal liver tests usually become normal after stopping the drug. Alcohol should be limited while you are taking methotrexate.
- Lung inflammation, infection or lymphoma
- Low platelet level - excessive or abnormal bleeding
- Low red blood cell level or anemia -feeling tired or short of breath
- Low white blood cells level -infections and less ability to fight infections
- Bone marrow problems - more common with high methotrexate doses in patients with kidney disease who may not be able to eliminate methotrexate and in patients taking Trimethoprim found in the antibiotic Bactrim and other medications.
- Cancer- No increased risk except for a rare form of lymphoma which can be caused by long-term methotrexate. This tumor usually goes away when the methotrexate is stopped.

How do you use methotrexate safely?

- Have regular blood tests and liver function tests.
- Limit alcohol to two drinks a month.
- Take daily folic or folinic acid.
- Do not take 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.