

Ophthalmology

Methotrexate for uveitis

Introduction

Methotrexate is a medicine that can help prevent uveitis from causing damage to your eye. You can discuss the benefits and risks of taking methotrexate with your healthcare professional.

About methotrexate

Methotrexate is a type of medicine called an “immunosuppressants”.

Immunosuppressants are prescribed in conditions when the body’s own defence mechanisms attack your own cells such as in Uveitis and autoimmune diseases and rheumatoid arthritis. Your body’s response is to fight back which causes inflammation, making things like pain, swelling and redness happen.

We use medicines called immunosuppressants, like methotrexate to calm our body’s defence system. This will reduce the effects of the sickness and inflammation.

About uveitis

Uveitis is sometimes linked to autoimmune or inflammatory conditions. Sometimes no known cause is found.



Patient Information

The effects of uveitis can be sight threatening due to the recurrent bouts of inflammation. This can lead to permanent damage to your eye.

Why do we take steroids and Methotrexate?

Methotrexate does not work right away, it can take up to 3 months before you notice any benefit in your symptoms.

It's important to keep taking methotrexate even if it doesn't seem to be working at first.

It's also important to keep taking it when your symptoms start to improve, as this will help control your condition.

How and when to take methotrexate

Methotrexate can be taken as a tablet, liquid, or injection.

Methotrexate should be taken on the same day once a week. You will be given a starting dose of methotrexate, but this might be increased if it isn't helping your symptoms.

If you are starting methotrexate injections, you will usually be given the information on how to administer the injection.

It's recommended that you take the capsule or tablet with food and water. and swallow the tablets whole as this can stop you feeling sick and getting stomach pains.

- Do not break or crush them
- Do not take any capsules that have broken or split open

What if you miss a dose?

If you forget to take your medicine. take it as soon as you remember, but only if it's been less than 2 days. If it's been more than two days, wait until it is time for your next dose. Do not take 2 doses at once to make up for the one you missed.

Patient Information

Side-effects

Methotrexate can cause number of side effects:

- feeling sick
- headaches
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- shortness of breath
- mouth ulcers
- minor hair loss and hair thinning
- rashes or blisters
- a sore throat
- raised temperature or fever
- flushing or sweating
- changes to your urine and how often you pee
- a cough
- loss of appetite
- unexplained bruising or bleeding
- yellowing of the skin or eyes, known as jaundice.
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If you are concerned by any side effects, contact a health care professional /pharmacist for advice.

Tell your doctor or nurse specialist straight away if you start to feel unwell or develop new symptoms that worry you.

Chickenpox or shingles

Contact your doctor right away if you develop or come into contact with someone with chickenpox or shingles. These infections can be serious in some people who are taking methotrexate. You might need treatment against chickenpox or shingles, and you might be told to stop taking methotrexate until you are better.

Folic acid supplement

Folic acid is also prescribed to lower the side effects and harmful effects of the methotrexate. It should be taken 2 to 3 days after the methotrexate. Do not take the folic acid on the same day as the methotrexate as it will stop the folic acid from working.

Taking methotrexate with other medicines

Methotrexate can sometimes be given along with other medicines to treat your condition. You can usually keep taking painkillers like paracetamol if you need them unless your doctor advises differently. Avoid taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), including aspirin or ibuprofen, or medicines containing NSAIDs, such as over-the-counter cold medication.

There are different types of medicines that react with methotrexate. It's best to avoid them if you can. These include some antibiotics and herbal medicine.

Always check with your pharmacist or GP before taking any new medication or over-the-counter product to make sure it won't interfere with your methotrexate treatment.

Blood tests

It's very important that you have blood tests to check your blood count, kidney, and liver function before starting methotrexate. You will have regular blood tests, as methotrexate can affect your liver and cause your body to make fewer blood cells. At first, you'll need to have blood tests at least every 2 weeks. Once you are on a stable dose of methotrexate you should only need tests every 2 to 3 months for as long as you take it.

Smoking

If you smoke, it's worth cutting down or preferably giving up. Smoking increases your risk of complications with your condition and its treatments.

Patient Information

Alcohol

Alcohol and methotrexate can both affect your liver. It's important you stick to the national guidelines.

The government guidelines say you should have no more than 14 units of alcohol a week, spread across 3 or more days.

You can find out more about units of alcohol at www.drinkaware.co.uk

Having surgery

Speak to your eye doctor if it will affect your routine methotrexate treatment.

Vaccines

If you need to have a vaccine while taking methotrexate, talk to your doctor or pharmacist first. Your doctor will have to advise you on what vaccines you can have.

It's a good idea to get:

- the pneumococcal vaccine, to protect you against the most common cause of pneumonia
- your yearly flu vaccines
- COVID-19 vaccinations

Chickenpox vaccine

If you have not had chickenpox, tell your GP. They may offer you vaccine against it. The chickenpox vaccine may also be offered to people living with you before if they have not had the virus.

Stay away from anyone who has had the live oral polio vaccine, for 6 weeks.

Patient Information

Shingles vaccine

If you're offered a shingles vaccine, you should speak to your healthcare professional. You might still be able to have it if you're on a low dose of methotrexate.

Fertility and pregnancy

Women using methotrexate should use contraception or encourage their partner to. Talk to your doctor if you plan to start a family. You shouldn't take methotrexate if you're pregnant or trying for a baby, as it can affect the development of an unborn baby. Stop taking methotrexate 3 months before you become pregnant. If you become pregnant while taking methotrexate or if you've had less than a 3 month break from the medicine, contact your doctor as soon as possible.

It used to be recommended that men stop methotrexate 3 months before trying for a baby. But research now shows it's fine for men to continue taking methotrexate when trying for a baby with their partner. If you are planning to have a baby, it's important to take folic acid to support your and your baby's health.

Breast-feeding

It is not recommended to breastfeed while methotrexate because the medicine might pass into breast milk, and we don't yet know what effects this could have on a baby. Your doctors will usually recommend going straight back onto methotrexate once you've finished breastfeeding. The sooner you can get back on your medication, the lower the risk of having a flare up of your condition.

Contact numbers

University Hospital Coventry

Retinal Specialist Nurse, Sister Mann (Jas):

024 7696 4000 (switchboard) and ask them to bleep **2828**

E-mail jasbir.mann@uhcw.nhs.uk

Patient Information

Mr Pagliarini and Miss Priti Kulkarni secretary: **024 76 966497**

Secretary e-mail: ketisa.mukwana@uhcw.nhs.uk

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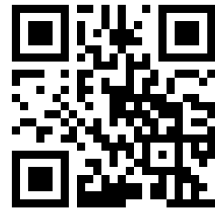
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Document History

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Emergency eye appointments: New booking system

If you have an urgent eye problem, you can now book an on-the-day telephone consultation via the Eye Emergency Referral Service (EERS).



Scan the QR code or visit www.uhcw.nhs.uk and search Eye Emergency Referral Service. You can book a telephone consultation via this link.

You will be spoken to by an expert clinician who will give you specialist advice on the next steps to take. Please provide a phone number which you can be contacted on for the consultation. Please also be aware that you will be phoned as close to the allotted time as possible, although at busy times unfortunately there may be a delay.

In the event that you feel you cannot wait to speak to someone, or do not have online access, then you may call 0247 696 4800.

This phone line is open 9am - 1pm; 1.30pm - 5pm (Monday - Friday, excluding bank holidays) and 9am - 12pm (Saturday).

Please only attend the Eye Outpatient department if you have had a telephone consultation in advance and have been advised to attend.

In the event of an eye emergency out of hours, please attend the minor injuries unit at UHCW.