

METHOTREXATE

Methotrexate is a very important medication for treating immune system diseases, including rheumatoid arthritis.

Methotrexate works by calming down parts of the immune system that have become too active. In people with rheumatoid arthritis, methotrexate reduces joint pain and swelling, prevents joint damage, and protects other parts of the body like the skin, lungs, and eyes.

HOW IS IT USED?

Methotrexate comes either as a pill or as a shot (injection).

- You will take your Methotrexate dose **ONCE A WEEK** (example: every Sunday).
- Your doctor will also prescribe a folic acid vitamin pill to take every day, to reduce the chance of side effects.

Methotrexate is usually started at a low dose, then increased slowly over several weeks to help you adjust to it. It is important to follow your doctor's instructions carefully when taking methotrexate.



Remember:
Only take
Methotrexate
ONCE A WEEK.

METHOTREXATE HELPS:

- ✓ Reduces the pain and swelling of arthritis
- ✓ Slows the progression of arthritis
- ✓ Reduces the risk of permanent joint damage

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

? Alcohol

Heavy drinking should be avoided for anyone taking methotrexate, because it can cause liver damage.

? Pregnancy

Methotrexate can cause serious birth defects, so it is important to use reliable birth control to avoid becoming pregnant while taking methotrexate. You should also not take methotrexate while breastfeeding.

? Blood tests

You will need to have blood tests regularly while taking methotrexate (usually every 3 months) to watch out for any side effects.

? Takes time to start working

You can expect to see some improvement in your symptoms after 1-2 months on methotrexate, but it can take up to 4 months to see the full effect. You will need to continue taking methotrexate even once your symptoms improve and you are feeling better.



METHOTREXATE

Possible side effects

Most people who take methotrexate do not have any serious side effects. It is important to know about some possible symptoms:

- Stomach upset
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Mouth sores
- Hair thinning

Tips for taking Methotrexate

- Taking folic acid every day can prevent many of these symptoms.
- Taking methotrexate in the evening after dinner may help with stomach upset.
- Tell your doctor if you are noticing any side effects.
- Rarely, methotrexate can lower the blood counts or cause liver issues. This is why your doctor will check blood tests for you every few months.
- Methotrexate can make it a little bit harder for your body to fight off infections. It is important to talk to your doctor about staying up to date on vaccinations (including a flu shot and COVID booster every year).

Who should not take Methotrexate?

- ✗ People who are pregnant or breastfeeding
- ✗ People who want to become pregnant in the next 3 months
- ✗ People with liver problems
- ✗ People who drink alcohol heavily
- ✗ People actively undergoing cancer treatment

WHEN TO TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

- ✓ If you develop signs of infection, such as fever or cough, you should pause methotrexate and contact your doctor
- ✓ If you become pregnant, stop methotrexate immediately and contact your doctor. Women should stop methotrexate at least 3 months before trying to conceive. Even though methotrexate is not safe during pregnancy, it does not lower a woman's chance of becoming pregnant. Men can safely continue methotrexate while trying to conceive.
- ✓ If you are diagnosed with cancer, contact your doctor because your methotrexate will likely need to be paused.
- ✓ If your joint pain is still disrupting your daily life, your methotrexate dose may need to be increased, or you may need to take additional medications.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

? Is methotrexate a chemotherapy (cancer) drug?

Methotrexate is used to treat some cancers, but the doses used for cancer are MUCH higher than the doses used for rheumatoid arthritis and other immune system diseases.

? Can I still take pain medicines like Ibuprofen and Tylenol with methotrexate?

Yes, it is safe to continue taking these if you need them (and if your doctor agrees). Once the methotrexate has had a chance to start working, you will probably find that you won't need the pain medications as much.

? What should I do if I forget to take my methotrexate one week?

If you remember the next day, then you can take it that day. For instance, if you usually take it on Sunday, and you forget but remember it Monday, you can take it on Monday. If you remember later in the week, you should just skip it until the following week.

