

## Medication Information Sheet

# methotrexate

 (meth-oh-TREX-ate)

*This document provides general information about your medication. It does not replace the advice of your health care professional. Always discuss your therapy with your health care professional and refer to the package insert for more details.*

**Appearance:** Yellow tablets or clear, yellow liquid for injection

## What is this medication for?

For treating many types of cancer, including some breast or bladder cancers, lymphomas, leukemias or sarcomas

## What should I do before I have this medication?

- Tell your health care team if you have or had significant medical condition(s), especially if you have / had:
  - liver problems (such as hepatitis),
  - kidney problems,
  - or if you have any allergies.
- Some methotrexate tablets contains a small amount of lactose. If you cannot have lactose, talk to your healthcare team.

### Remember to:

- Tell your health care team about all of the other medications you are taking.
- Keep taking other medications that have been prescribed for you, unless you have been told not to by your health care team.

## How will this medication affect sex, pregnancy and breastfeeding?

### Talk to your health care team about:

- How this medication may affect your sexual health.
- Changes to your menstrual cycle (periods), if this applies to you.
- How this medication may affect your ability to have a baby, if this applies to you.

This medication may harm an unborn baby. Tell your health care team if you or your partner are pregnant, become pregnant during treatment, or are breastfeeding.

- If there is **any** chance of pregnancy happening, you and your partner together must use **2 effective forms of birth control** at the same time until at least **6 months** after your last dose. Talk to your health care team about which birth control options are best for you.
- Do not breastfeed while on this medication.

## How is this medication given?

- Methotrexate may be given through an IV (injected into a vein), as IM (injected into muscle), or as a tablet (pill) you take by mouth. This will depend on what you are taking methotrexate for. Talk to your healthcare team about your treatment schedule.
- If you missed your treatment appointment for methotrexate IV or IM, talk to your health care team to find out what to do.
- If you are taking methotrexate oral tablets:
  - ◊ Take these by mouth exactly as directed by your health care team. How often you take them will depend on your treatment schedule.
  - ◊ Swallow whole with a glass of water on an empty stomach, at least 1 hour before or 2 hours after food.
  - ◊ Avoid taking methotrexate tablets with milk products. They can make the drug not work as well.
  - ◊ If you miss your dose, talk to your health care team to find out what to do.
  - ◊ If you vomit (throw up) after taking your medication, talk to your health care team about what to do.
  - ◊ If you take too much of your oral anticancer medication by accident, or if you think a child or a pet may have swallowed your medication, you must call the Ontario Poison Control Center right away at: 1-800-268-9017.

## To Prevent or Treat Nausea and Vomiting

- You may be given medications to help prevent nausea (feeling like throwing up) and vomiting (throwing up) before they start.

These are called anti-nausea medications and include medications such as ondansetron (Zofran®), granisetron (Kytril®), dexamethasone (Decadron®), prochlorperazine (Stemetil®), or others.

### To Lower your Chance of Side Effects

- If you are receiving high doses of methotrexate, you will also be given leucovorin (a type of vitamin) and fluids through an IV (injected into a vein) to reduce the side effects of methotrexate.
- If you are given leucovorin, talk to your health care team about how and when to take this medication. See our [leucovorin](#) patient info sheet for more information.

## What else do I need to know while on this medication?

### Will this medication interact with other medications or natural health products?

- This medication can interact with many other medications, vitamins, foods and natural health products. Interactions can make the treatment not work as well or cause severe side effects.
- Tell your health care team about all of your:
  - prescription and over-the-counter (non-prescription) medications and all other drugs, such as cannabis / marijuana (medical or recreational)
  - natural health products such as vitamins, herbal teas, homeopathic medicines, and other supplements
- Check with your health care team before starting or stopping any of them.
- If you take seizure medications (such as phenytoin), your health care team may monitor your blood levels closely and may change your dose.
- If you are taking a blood thinner (such as warfarin), your health care team may need extra blood tests and may change your dose.

### What should I do if I feel unwell, have pain, a headache or a fever?

- **Always** check your temperature to see if you have a fever **before** taking any medications for fever or pain (such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®)).
  - Fever can be a sign of infection that may need treatment right away.
  - If you take these medications before you check for fever, they may lower your temperature and you may not know you have an infection.

### How to check for fever:

Keep a digital (electronic) thermometer at home and take your temperature if you feel hot or unwell (for example, chills, headache, mild pain).

- You have a fever if your temperature taken in your mouth (oral temperature) is:
  - 38.3°C (100.9°F) or higher at any time

OR

- 38.0°C (100.4°F) or higher for at least one hour.

**If you do have a fever:**

- **Try to contact your health care team. If you are not able to talk to them for advice, you MUST get emergency medical help right away.**
- Ask your health care team for the [Fever](#) pamphlet for more information.

**If you do not have a fever** but have mild symptoms such as headache or mild pain:

- Ask your health care team about the right medication for you. **Acetaminophen (Tylenol®)** is a safe choice for most people.
- **DO NOT** take ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), naproxen (Aleve®) or ASA (Aspirin®), **until you talk to your health care team** as they may make your side effects worse.
- Talk to your health care team if you already take **low dose aspirin** for a medical condition (such as a heart problem). It may still be safe to take.

**What to DO while on this medication:**

- DO check with your health care team before getting any vaccinations, surgery, dental work or other medical procedures.
- DO consider asking someone to drive you to and from the hospital on your treatment days.
- DO tell your health care team about any serious infections that you have now or have had in the past.
- DO protect your skin from the sun. Wear a long sleeved shirt, long pants and a hat. Apply sunscreen with UVA and UVB protection and an SPF of at least 30. Your skin may be more sensitive to the sun and you could develop a bad sunburn or rash more easily.
- DO drink plenty of fluids (unless told differently) to prevent kidney problems. Drink at least 6 to 8 cups (2 Litres) of water or other liquids per day and urinate (pee) often., unless your healthcare team has told you to drink more or less.

**What NOT to DO while on this medication:**

- DO NOT smoke or drink alcohol while on treatment without talking to your health care team first. Smoking and drinking can make side effects worse and make your treatment not work as well.
- DO NOT drive, operate machinery or do any tasks that need you to be alert if you feel tired or dizzy.

**How should I safely store this medication?**

**Oral tablets:**

- Store in the original packaging at room temperature, away from heat, light or moisture. Keep out of reach of children and pets.
- Do not throw out any unused drugs at home. Bring them to your pharmacy for safe disposal.

**How to safely touch oral anti-cancer medications**

**If you are a patient:**

- Wash your hands before and after touching your oral anti-cancer medication.
- Swallow each pill whole. Do not crush or chew your pills.

**If you are a caregiver:**

- Wear nitrile or latex gloves when touching tablets, capsules or liquids.
- Wash your hands before putting on your gloves and after taking them off, even if your skin did not touch the oral anti-cancer medication.
- Throw out your gloves after each use. Do not re-use gloves.
- Do not touch oral anti-cancer medications if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

**What to do if oral anti-cancer medication gets on your skin or in your eyes**

**If medication gets on your skin:**

- Wash your skin with a lot of soap and water.
- If your skin gets red or irritated, talk to your health care team.

**If medication gets in your eyes:**

- Rinse your eyes with running water right away. Keep water flowing over your open eyes for at least 15 minutes.

## What are the side effects of this medication?

The following table lists side effects that you may have when getting methotrexate. Methotrexate is usually given along with other medications to treat cancer; some of the side effects listed below may be due to those other medications. How likely you are to have a side effect will depend on your methotrexate dose.

The table is set up to list the most common side effects first and the least common last. It is unlikely that you will have all of the side effects listed and you may have some that are not listed.

Read over the side effect table so that you know what to look for and when to get help. Refer to this table if you experience any side effects while on methotrexate.

<b>More Common Side Effects (10 or more out of 100 people)</b>	
<b>Side effects and what to do</b>	<b>When to contact health care team</b>
<p><b>Nausea and vomiting</b></p> <p><b>What to look for?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nausea is feeling like you need to throw up. You may also feel light-headed.</li> <li>• You may feel nausea within hours to days after your treatment.</li> <li>• Nausea and vomiting are more likely to happen with high dose methotrexate.</li> </ul> <p><b>What to do?</b></p> <p><b>To help prevent nausea:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is easier to prevent nausea than to treat it once it happens.</li> <li>• If you were given anti-nausea medication(s), take them as prescribed, even if you do not feel like throwing up.</li> <li>• Drink clear liquids and have small meals. Get fresh air and rest.</li> <li>• Do not eat spicy, fried foods or foods with a strong smell.</li> <li>• Limit caffeine (like coffee, tea) and avoid alcohol.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have nausea or vomiting:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take your rescue (as-needed) anti-nausea medication(s) as prescribed.</li> <li>• Ask your health care team for the <a href="#">Nausea &amp; Vomiting</a> pamphlet for more information.</li> <li>• Talk to your health care team if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ nausea lasts more than 48 hours</li> <li>◦ vomiting lasts more than 24 hours or if it is severe</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Talk to your healthcare team if nausea lasts more than 48 hours or vomiting lasts more than 24 hours or if it is severe</p>

More Common Side Effects (10 or more out of 100 people)	
Side effects and what to do	When to contact health care team
<p><b>Mouth sores</b></p> <p>(May be severe)</p> <p><b>What to look for?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Round, painful, white or gray sores inside your mouth that can occur on the tongue, lips, gums, or inside your cheeks.</li> <li>• In more severe cases they may make it hard to swallow, eat or brush your teeth.</li> <li>• They may last for 3 days or longer.</li> </ul> <p><b>What to do?</b></p> <p><b>To help prevent mouth sores:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take care of your mouth by gently brushing and flossing regularly.</li> <li>• Rinse your mouth often with a homemade mouthwash.</li> <li>• To make a homemade mouthwash, mix 1 teaspoonful of baking soda and 1 teaspoonful of salt in 4 cups (1L) of water.</li> <li>• Do not use store-bought mouthwashes, especially those with alcohol, because they may irritate your mouth.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have mouth sores:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid hot, spicy, acidic, hard or crunchy foods.</li> <li>• Your doctor may prescribe a special mouthwash to relieve mouth sores and prevent infection.</li> <li>• <b>Talk to your health care team as soon as you notice mouth or lip sores or if it hurts to eat, drink or swallow.</b></li> </ul> <p>Ask your health care team for the <a href="#">Oral Care (Mouth Care)</a> pamphlet for more information.</p>	<p>Talk to your health care team as soon as you notice mouth or lip sores or if it hurts to eat, drink or swallow</p>
<p><b>Low appetite</b></p> <p><b>What to look for?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of interest in food or not feeling hungry.</li> <li>• Weight loss.</li> </ul> <p><b>What to do?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to eat your favourite foods.</li> <li>• Eat small meals throughout the day.</li> </ul>	<p>Talk to your health care team if it does not improve or if it is severe</p>

<b>More Common Side Effects (10 or more out of 100 people)</b>	
<b>Side effects and what to do</b>	<b>When to contact health care team</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may need to take meal supplements to help keep your weight up.</li> <li>Talk to your health care team if you have no appetite.</li> </ul> <p>Ask your health care team for the <a href="#">Loss of Appetite</a> pamphlet for more information.</p>	
<p><b>Heartburn; stomach upset; bloating</b></p> <p><b>What to look for?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pain or burning in the middle or top part of your chest. It may get worse when you are lying down or bending over or when you swallow.</li> <li>A bitter or acidic taste in your mouth.</li> </ul> <p><b>What to do?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drink clear liquids and eat small meals.</li> <li>Do not eat acidic, fatty or spicy foods.</li> <li>Limit caffeine (like coffee, tea) and avoid alcohol.</li> <li>Avoid smoking or being around tobacco.</li> <li>Sit up or stand after eating. Do not lie down.</li> <li>Raise the head of your bed six to eight inches. You may need to use extra pillows to do this.</li> </ul>	Talk to your health care team if it does not improve or if it is severe
<p><b>Liver problems</b></p> <p>(May be severe)</p> <p>Your health care team may check your liver function with a blood test. The liver changes do not usually cause any symptoms.</p> <p><b>What to look for?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rarely, you may develop yellowish skin or eyes, unusually dark pee or pain on the right side of your belly. This may be severe.</li> </ul> <p><b>What to do?</b></p> <p><b>If you have any symptoms of liver problems, get emergency medical help right away.</b></p>	Get emergency medical help right away



**Other rare, but serious side effects are possible.**

**If you experience ANY of the following, speak to your cancer health care provider or get emergency medical help right away:**

- Bleeding from your gums, unusual nosebleeds, bruising easily or more than normal, or blood in your urine (pee) or stools (poo). If you have bleeding that doesn't stop or is very heavy, you must get emergency help.
- Signs of kidney problems such as lower back pain, swelling, pee less than usual and have weight gain that is not normal for you.
- Signs of an allergic reaction such as rash, swollen lips, face or tongue, chest and throat tightness
- Severe chest, belly , back or arm pain
- Pain, swelling or hardening of a vein in your arm or leg
- New cough, trouble breathing or coughing up blood
- Feeling confused, trouble speaking or moving your arms or legs
- Severe headache
- New problems with balance, memory, difficulty with speaking or movements, personality changes
- Any new changes to your vision
- Severe muscle weakness, twitching
- Seizures
- Severe rash in areas where you have had radiation before
- Severe rash, marks that may appear as "bulls-eyes", may blister or peel, or appear together with swollen lymph glands
- Red or purple patches on your skin or a rash that do not turn white when pressed

**Who do I contact if I have questions or need help?**

My cancer health care provider is: \_\_\_\_\_

During the day I should contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Evenings, weekends and holidays: \_\_\_\_\_

