

# Methotrexate

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Methotrexate is a medication that may be used to treat psoriasis or eczema, although it is also used to treat a number of other dermatologic conditions. It works by blocking an enzyme involved in the growth of cells. Methotrexate has been around since the 1950s. It was initially approved to treat certain types of cancer and it is still used for this purpose today. It was approved for use in psoriasis in the 1970s. The medication is relatively inexpensive and usually covered by insurance. Methotrexate is also effective for the treatment of psoriatic arthritis.

- **Methotrexate is taken once weekly.** This is extremely important. If the medication is taken every day accidentally instead of every week it can cause serious harm. Pick a day of the week that you are most likely to remember to take it. Blood tests are done frequently when the medication is first started and the dose is usually changed depending upon side effects and response. Methotrexate comes in 2.5mg tablets and the weekly dose is typically taken all at once or half in the morning and half in the evening of the same day. For example if you are taking 15mg weekly (a typical dose) you would take all 6 tablets on the same day each week.
- **Methotrexate can cause birth effects if taken during pregnancy.** If you are trying to get pregnant methotrexate is not the medication for you. If you are taking methotrexate and could possibly get pregnant you should be on some form of hormonal birth control or an IUD to prevent this.
- **Possible side effects. Methotrexate may cause several side effects, but the most common are typically stomach upset, nausea and sores in the mouth.** Other possible side effects include anemia, decreased white blood cell count, and increased risk of infections, hair loss, and diarrhea. If you are developing severe nausea or sores in your mouth you need to let us know of this. A small percentage of patients develop liver inflammation and there is an increased risk of inflammation of the lungs. Often the vitamin folic acid is taken to reduce the chance of these side effects. Because of the concern about liver toxicity blood tests are ordered periodically and patients who reach a cumulative dose of 3 g (which takes years) are usually advised to have a liver biopsy if they elect to continue on the medication beyond that cumulative dose. Methotrexate also reduces the body's ability to fight off infections and therefore may increase the risk of certain infections. There are multiple other possible adverse effects, a complete list of adverse effects is beyond the scope of this document but are listed in the package insert when you get your medication.
- **Alcohol consumption may increase the risk of liver toxicity from methotrexate.** Individuals who are taking methotrexate are usually advised to keep their alcohol intake to an absolute minimum.
- **Other medications.** Many other medications can be taken safely with methotrexate but some should not be used with methotrexate. If you are prescribed a new medication always mention that you are taking methotrexate. One medication that should NEVER be used with methotrexate are sulfa-based antibiotics, such as Bactrim.

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9/7/2017 Revised