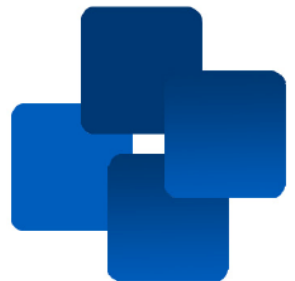


Patient Information

Azathioprine Therapy

Renal Department



Why have I been prescribed this medication?

Azathioprine is a drug that can be used to treat a variety of medical conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease, lupus and vasculitis. It is also used as an anti-rejection medicine after organ transplantation to stop the body rejecting the transplant. The clinician that prescribes this medicine for you will tell you about your condition and why azathioprine is being prescribed.

How does it work?

Azathioprine belongs to a group of medicines known as immunosuppressants. It helps to reduce or suppress your body's own immune system. Your immune system helps to protect you against infections. However, sometimes it can overreact or react abnormally and cause illness. Azathioprine can be used to treat these conditions, often in combination with other medicines.

How long does it take to work?

Azathioprine works slowly and takes several weeks to take effect.

What dose do I take?

The dose of azathioprine depends on your weight and the medical condition being treated. Typical doses vary between 25mg to 150mg, once a day.

How do I take it?

Azathioprine is available as 25mg and 50mg tablets.

- You should always take the medicines as directed by your doctor
- You should take azathioprine with or immediately after food to help reduce stomach upsets
- Do not cut the tablets in half as this can create small amounts of dust that could cause side effects to you and those around you
- You do not need to stick to a specific brand of azathioprine

How long will I be taking it?

The length of time you will be taking azathioprine will depend on the condition being treated. Do not stop taking your medicine unless your doctor tells you to.

What happens if I forget to take a dose?

If you remember within 12 hours of your dose being due then take your dose as usual. If it is more than 12 hours since your dose was due, do not take the dose and take your next dose at the normal time.

Do I need any special checks while on azathioprine?

Azathioprine can affect your immune system and other blood cells. Although these effects are rare, it is important that you have regular blood tests to check for early signs of changes in the blood. Your doctor will tell you how often the blood tests need to be carried out, but this is usually every 2 weeks for the first 6 weeks, then usually reduced to every 3 months.

Does azathioprine interfere with my other medicines?

Azathioprine can interact with other medicines. You should tell your doctor which medicines you are taking before starting azathioprine.

- Do not take allopurinol (a medicine used to prevent gout) without discussing with your doctor first
- Other medicines which interact with azathioprine include co-trimoxazole, trimethoprim and warfarin. Please let your doctor know if you take any of these medicines
- Always check with your doctor or pharmacist first before starting any new medication
- You should avoid 'live' vaccines but most travel vaccines and the 'flu' and 'covid' jabs are ok
- It is safe to drink alcohol in moderation while taking azathioprine but it may make nausea worse

Can azathioprine cause side effects?

All medicines can cause unwanted side effects which usually improve as your body gets used to the new medication. During the early weeks you may notice:

- Generally not feeling quite yourself, including some dizziness and aches and pains
- Stomach upsets, such as feeling sick or diarrhoea
- Rash
- Bruising
- Hair loss, although hair often starts to grow again
- You are more likely to catch infections
- Decrease in blood cell numbers, but your doctor will be testing you regularly as stated above

In the long-term there is a higher risk of tumours including skin cancers and a condition called lymphoproliferative disorders. We recommend

that you use a high factor sun cream to prevent skin damage and regular surveillance, such as cervical screening (smear tests) for women.

Is it ok to have azathioprine during pregnancy and breastfeeding?

If you are planning to become pregnant while you are taking azathioprine, you should discuss this with your doctor.

Current guidelines say that azathioprine can be taken when pregnant or breastfeeding. It is safe for men to continue taking azathioprine when trying for a baby.

Possible risks

You should tell your doctor or nurse specialist straight away if you develop any of the following after starting azathioprine:

- A sore throat, fever or any other signs of infection
- Unexplained bruising or bleeding
- You feel persistently unwell with being sick or you have a temperature
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes (this is known as jaundice)
- Any new symptoms that concern you

It is important to have regular blood tests as mentioned in this leaflet. If you don't have regular blood tests it is not safe for your doctor to prescribe azathioprine for you.

Tips to reduce your risk of infection

- Try to avoid close contact with people you know have an infection
- Wash your hands regularly and carry round a small bottle of antibacterial gel to use
- Keep your mouth clean by brushing your teeth regularly
- Make sure your food is stored and prepared properly
- Try to keep your house clean and hygienic, especially the kitchen, bathrooms and toilets
- Have your yearly 'flu vaccine

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