

METHOTREXATE

(ALSO CALLED MEXATE)

What it Does: This chemotherapy drug interferes with cancer cell growth by damaging the building blocks of the cell (DNA or RNA) so that the cancer cells cannot continue to grow and multiply. Chemotherapy affects normal cells in the body as well as cancer cells. This is why certain side effects occur. Normal cells repair themselves faster than cancer cells; therefore, most of the side effects diminish over time when the drug is not being administered.

How it is Given: Methotrexate is given intravenously (by injection into a vein in the arm or port-a-cath). With some treatment protocols, Methotrexate is also given orally in tablet form, or by injection into the muscle.

Possible Side Effects and What to do About Them:

Nausea and Vomiting:

- Take prescribed medication as needed for any nausea and vomiting that may occur.
- When nauseated, sip on small amounts at a time of clear liquids such as ginger-ale, broth, or eat Jello, Popsicles, etc. Dry crackers, toast, and popcorn may also help reduce nausea.
- Avoid fatty, highly salted, or spicy foods

Low Blood Counts: Methotrexate may cause bone marrow depression (your blood counts to drop.) Your doctor will notify you if your blood counts are low. Call your physician/nurse if you develop:

- Fever of 101 or higher and/or chills
- Any nose or gum bleeding
- Blood in your stool or urine
- Excessive bruising
- Cough or sore throat

Photosensitivity: You may sunburn very easily while taking this medication.

- While being outdoors, use sunblock lotions to exposed skin.
- Wear protective clothing when you are out in the sun.

Sore Mouth: If you develop any sore or ulcers in your mouth, notify your physician or nurse for a prescription mouthwash. Do not use a commercial mouthwash – most of them contain alcohol, which may cause further irritation.

- Keep your mouth clean; use a soft bristle toothbrush and rinse your mouth after meals and at bedtime with salt water (1 tsp. of salt in 1 qt. of water) or 1 tsp. of baking soda in 8 oz. water
- If you wear dentures, remove them if your gums are sore and irritated
- Keep lips moistened with Vaseline
- Avoid hot, spicy foods as well as acidic foods and juices - cool foods seem to be more soothing
- Avoid use of alcohol and tobacco

Hair Loss: This drug may or may not cause hair loss. If hair loss occurs, hair growth will begin 1-2 months after treatment is complete. In some cases, the hair will start to grow back while you are still on treatment.

- You may want to purchase a wig before your hair loss occurs in order to match your color and style. (Some insurance companies will cover the cost of a wig.)
- Turbans, hats, and scarves are quite helpful to protect the scalp.

Effects on the Kidneys: Although it is rare, Methotrexate can cause kidney damage. This is more commonly seen when it is given in high doses.

Diarrhea: You may or may not experience diarrhea after receiving Methotrexate. If you should develop diarrhea you should:

- Report (3-4 loose stools/day) to your doctor/nurse.
- Avoid foods high in roughage and fibers such as raw fruits and vegetables.
- Drink plenty of fluids per day.