

Patient Information

Azathioprine

Eye Unit

What is Azathioprine?

Azathioprine is a drug that can be helpful for people with eye inflammation. It was not originally designed for this; however, it is now given to patients who have this condition as it has proved to be useful in controlling the symptoms of their illness. Please note: It is important that you read the manufacturer's leaflet as well as this one because it contains general information about the drug that you will need to know. Please remember that it is not written for patients with eye (ocular) inflammation, so some of the information in it may not be relevant to you.

Why have I been given Azathioprine?

You have been given this drug to improve your eye condition. It is an immunosuppressant and helps to reduce inflammation. It usually improves the symptoms over a longer period of time, however it may take up to 2 to 3 months before you notice an improvement in your condition.

What dose should I take?

Azathioprine is a tablet that comes in two strengths, 25mg and 50mg. It is usually taken 2-3 times a day with food. You should avoid milk or dairy products at least 1 hour before and 2 hours after. Your doctor will advise you about the exact dose; it will depend on your condition and weight. Your doctor may increase the dose later if needed.

What happens if I miss a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember. However if the next dose is less than 2 hours away, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed dose.

Are there any side effects?

All drugs can have side effects, although most people do not have any. These include:

- Being sick (vomiting)
- Diarrhoea
- Skin rashes
- Increased sensitivity to sunlight.

Azathioprine can lower the amount of blood cells that help your body fight infection, as well as affect the liver. You will have blood tests before commencing treatment and regular blood tests whilst taking the medication to check for this.

Please tell your doctor or specialist nurse if you develop any of the following after starting azathioprine:

- A sore throat
- A fever
- Any signs of infection (redness/ swelling/ pain)
- Unexplained bruising or bleeding
- Any new symptoms or anything else that concerns you

Can I take other drugs or medicines along with azathioprine?

Some drugs may interact with Azathioprine. You should always tell the doctor that you are taking this drug. You should not take over-the-counter medicines including herbal and complementary medicines without talking to your doctor or pharmacist first.

Immunisations

Some 'live' vaccines should not be given to patients on azathioprine. Other immunisations that are not 'live' and can be given while on azathioprine but they may be less effective whilst you are on this drug. Always discuss having the immunisation with your GP prior to administration.

Can I start a family whilst on Azathioprine?

Whether you are a male or a female, you should discuss any thoughts of starting a family with your doctor if you are taking Azathioprine.

Can I drink alcohol while taking Azathioprine?

You can drink but it should be in moderation and keep your intake of alcohol within the advised national guidelines.

Is there anything else I should avoid while taking Azathioprine?

This medicine can make your skin sensitive to sunlight. You should avoid being out in the sun for long periods at a time. You should wear protective clothing, sunglasses and sunscreen SPF 30 or above. This can increase your chance of skin cancer. Do not use sun beds whilst on this treatment.

Azathioprine may lower your ability to fight infection. Cooked chilled foods should be reheated thoroughly, and salads washed well to avoid potential bacteria contamination. Do not eat soft cheese made from unpasteurised milk. You should avoid contact with anyone who has chickenpox or shingles especially if you have never had these infections. If you do develop either, seek medical advice immediately.

Who should I contact if I have any concerns?

Monday - Friday

Clare Smith (Uveitis Specialist Nurse): Tel: 01633 238856 Email:

Clare.Smith4@wales.nhs.uk

Emergency Eye Clinic: Tel 01633 238856 Email:

emergencyeyeclinik.abb@wales.nhs.uk

Mrs Mitra's Secretary: Tel 01633 238155

Mrs Reynold's Secretary: Tel 01633 238445

For urgent advice out of usual working hours please contact 111.

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