



For the Patient: HNAVM

Treatment of Head and Neck cancer using Methotrexate

HN = Head and Neck (Tumour group)

AV = Advanced

M = Methotrexate

ABOUT THIS MEDICATION

What is this drug used for?

Methotrexate is an intravenous anticancer medication used for many types of cancer.

How does this drug work?

Methotrexate blocks an enzyme needed for cells to live. It blocks the enzyme process in cancer cells and prevents their growth. The result is the cancer cell dies.

INTENDED BENEFITS

- This therapy is given to destroy and/or prevent the growth of cancer cells in your body.
- It is expected to improve your current symptoms, and delay or prevent new symptoms from starting.
- This treatment is expected to delay the progression of your cancer.

TREATMENT SUMMARY

How are these drugs given?

- Methotrexate can be given intravenously every week or taken orally twice a week.
- Each week is one cycle. This is repeated until it no longer controls your cancer or you have intolerable side effects.
- Your doctor may ask you to drink plenty of liquids, e.g., 8-12 cups a day. This helps prevent kidney problems.

What will happen when I get my drugs?

- A blood test is done within one month prior to starting your first treatment.
- A blood test is done every two weeks during treatment. The dose and timing of your chemotherapy may be changed based on your blood counts and/or other side effects.
- Nausea is rare with dose you are prescribed; however, if you experience nausea, it is usually managed with dimenhydrinate (GRAVOL®). To prevent nausea, be well-hydrated and eat small meals frequently.

Treatment Protocol

Option 1:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Methotrexate Intravenous						

This weekly cycle will repeat until it no longer provides benefit.

Option 2:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Methotrexate Oral			Methotrexate Oral			

This weekly cycle will repeat until it no longer provides benefit.

What are the side effects of methotrexate, how often do they occur and how do I manage them?

Unexpected and unlikely side effects can occur with any drug treatment. The ones listed below are particularly important for you to be aware of as they are directly related to the common actions of the drugs in your treatment plan.

SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS	How common is it?	MANAGEMENT
Normal white blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. When they are low, you are at greater risk of having an infection.	uncommon	To help prevent infection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often and always after using the bathroom. • Take care of your skin and mouth. • Avoid crowds and people who are sick. • Call your doctor immediately at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.

SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS	How common is it?	MANAGEMENT
<p>Normal platelets help your blood to clot normally after an injury (e.g., cut). When the platelet count is low you may be more likely to bruise or bleed.</p>	<p>uncommon</p>	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not to bruise, cut, or burn yourself. • Clean your nose by blowing gently. Do not pick your nose. • Avoid constipation. • Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily. Maintain good oral hygiene. <p>Some medications such as ASA (e.g., ASPIRIN®) or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) may increase your risk of bleeding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., ASA for your heart). • For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) first, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable.
<p>Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing that does not resolve with rest.</p>	<p>rare</p>	<p>Call your doctor <i>immediately</i>. Go to your nearest emergency room.</p>

OTHER SIDE EFFECTS	How common is it?	MANAGEMENT
<p>Mouth sores can occur on the tongue, the sides of the mouth, or in the throat. Mouth sores or bleeding gums can lead to infection.</p>	<p>uncommon</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brush your teeth gently after eating and at bedtime with a very soft toothbrush. If your gums bleed, use gauze instead of a brush. Use baking soda instead of toothpaste. • Make a mouthwash with ½ teaspoon baking soda or salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day. • Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Sore Mouth during Chemotherapy</i>.
<p>Diarrhea may occur.</p>	<p>uncommon</p>	<p>To help diarrhea:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of liquids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Diarrhea During Chemotherapy</i>.
<p>Fever and chills may occur shortly after treatment with methotrexate. Fever should last no longer than 24 hours.</p>	<p>common</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day. • Fever which occurs more than a few days after treatment may be a sign of an infection.
<p>Tiredness, lack of energy and sometimes dizziness may occur.</p>	<p>common</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you are feeling tired. • Try the ideas in <i>Your Bank of Energy Savings: How People with Cancer can Handle Fatigue</i>.

OTHER SIDE EFFECTS	How common is it?	MANAGEMENT
Skin rashes may occur.	uncommon	To help itching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can use calamine lotion. • If very irritating, call your doctor during office hours. • Otherwise make sure to mention it at your next visit.
Your skin may darken in some areas.	uncommon	This will slowly return to normal once you stop treatment with methotrexate.
Your skin may sunburn easily.	uncommon	To help prevent sunburn: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid direct sunlight. • Wear a hat, long sleeves and long pants or skirt outside on sunny days. • Apply a sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 30.
Loss of appetite and weight loss are common and may persist long after discontinuation of methotrexate.	uncommon	Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Decreased Appetite</i> .
Hair loss may rarely occur. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with methotrexate.	rare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a gentle shampoo and soft brush. • Care should be taken with use of hair spray, bleaches, dyes, and perms.
Nausea and vomiting will not likely occur at the dose you are prescribed.	rare	It is easier to prevent nausea than to treat it once it has occurred, so follow directions closely. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of liquids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Try the ideas in <i>Food Choices to Help Control Nausea</i>.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PATIENT

If your doctor has prescribed the oral tablet, follow instructions carefully.

If you miss a scheduled dose, contact your doctor for instruction.

Store tablets at room temperature, away from heat and moisture.

Methotrexate may interact with many prescription and nonprescription medications, vitamins and herbal products. Consult your doctor or pharmacist if you begin any other medications, prescription or nonprescription, after you have begun treatment with methotrexate.

Avoid alcohol as it may increase the risk of liver problems with methotrexate.

Drink plenty of fluids to prevent kidney problems.

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS VERY IMPORTANT

STOP TAKING METHOTREXATE AND SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, pain or burning when you pass urine.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black tarry stools, blood in urine, pinpoint red spots on skin, extensive bruising.
- Signs of an **allergic reaction** (rare) soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling, or breathing problems.
- Signs of **lung problems** such as shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing.
- **Seizures** or **loss of consciousness**.
- Sudden **abdominal pain** or tenderness.

SEE YOUR DOCTOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Signs of **kidney problems** such as lower back or side pain, swelling of feet or lower legs or markedly decreased urine output.
- **Changes in eyesight**.
- Signs of **gout** such as joint pain.

CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONTINUE OR BOTHER YOU:

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- For diabetics: uncontrolled blood sugars.
- Headache not controlled with acetaminophen.
- Easy bruising or minor bleeding.
- Redness, swelling, pain, or sores where the needle was placed.
- Redness, swelling, pain, or sores on your lips, tongue, mouth, or throat.
- Skin rash or itching.

If you experience symptoms or changes in your body that have not been described above but worry you, or in any symptoms are severe, contact:

_____ at telephone
number: _____