



Read this important information before taking:

# Oral Methotrexate

(to treat conditions other than cancer)

Brought to you by the Institute for Safe Medication Practices

[ **Extra care is needed because oral methotrexate is a high-alert medicine.** ]

**High-alert medicines** have been proven to be safe and effective. But these medicines can cause serious injury if a mistake happens while taking them. This means that it is very important for you to know about this medicine and take it exactly as directed.



## DO NOT TAKE THIS MEDICINE EVERY DAY!

Fatal errors have happened when methotrexate was prescribed, dispensed, and/or taken daily instead of just once or twice a week. Treatment for rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis (or other conditions) requires just one dose taken each week.

### When receiving your prescription



**1 Look for the reason.** Ask your doctor to put the reason for your medicine on the prescription. Methotrexate might be taken daily for a week at a time if it is used to treat cancer. But it **should only be taken once a week** if used to treat arthritis, psoriasis, or other conditions besides cancer. If the pharmacist knows your condition, he or she will make sure the directions for taking your medicine are correct.



**2 Disclose all medicines.** Tell your doctor about all prescription, nonprescription, herbal, and vitamin products you take, particularly non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), aspirin, echinacea, and vitamins. Your doctor needs to determine if other medicines are safe to take with methotrexate.



**3 Know your dose.** Never leave the doctor's office or healthcare facility unless you know your weekly dose and how to take the medicine. Methotrexate doses used to treat conditions like psoriasis and rheumatoid arthritis are much smaller than doses used to treat cancer. For your condition, methotrexate is taken as a single dose each week. The medicine is **NEVER** taken daily to treat conditions other than cancer.



**4 Avoid during pregnancy or breastfeeding.** Let your doctor know if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant. Methotrexate may cause birth defects or death of the unborn baby if taken during pregnancy. If you are able to get pregnant, a pregnancy test will be done to be sure you are not pregnant before starting methotrexate. Also, do not take this medicine while breastfeeding, as it may reduce your infant's ability to fight infections.

### When filling your prescription



**5 Pick a day(s).** Pick the day(s) of the week that you'll be taking your medicine, and ask your pharmacist to include that in the instructions. Avoid "Monday," which has been misread as "Morning," misleading people to think a dose should be taken each "Morning."



Ask

**6 Ask for education.** Ask the pharmacist to go over the directions for taking the medicine. Be sure it agrees with what the doctor told you.



Tell

### To avoid serious side effects

**6 Tell your healthcare providers.** Tell all your doctors, dentists, and pharmacists that you are taking this medicine.



**8 Never take daily or extra doses.** Do not take methotrexate every day. Do not take extra doses for symptom relief. Relief of symptoms is gradual and begins in 3 to 6 weeks after starting the medicine. Continued improvement occurs during the first 12 weeks of taking the medicine.



**9 Avoid direct sunlight.** Methotrexate can cause an abnormal skin reaction if you are exposed to sunlight. You could develop a severe sunburn. If you are in the sun, use sunscreen on your skin and wear eye protection and a hat.



**10 Report side effects.** Tell your doctor about any side effects you experience, particularly diarrhea or black stools, mouth sores, rash, fever, chills, trouble breathing, racing heartbeat, bleeding, and changes in how often you urinate.



## Once a day is not the way!

**M**ethotrexate is a cancer medicine. However, it is also used to treat other conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis. It works well for these conditions if you take the medicine just once a week, and in smaller doses. But if you take the medicine every day by accident, you could be harmed. Sadly, some people have even died.

In several instances, this happened because people misread the directions on the prescription bottle.

In one case, a man with arthritis mistakenly took one tablet each morning, but the directions said to take one tablet each Monday.



In another case, the prescription label said to take the medicine weekly. But a woman took the medicine daily for 6 days in a row before noticing the error. Another man took many extra doses to help relieve arthritis pain, something that should **never** be done.

Harmful mistakes may happen because you, your doctor, and your pharmacist are more familiar with medicines that are taken daily. Serious harm, even death, could occur if you take methotrexate daily for conditions other than cancer.

See the **Top 10 List of Safety Tips** on the other side of this handout to help avoid mistakes.

Topics	Fast Facts
<b>Generic name</b>	■ methotrexate (pronounced meth o TREKS ate)
<b>Common brand names</b>	■ Trexall (generic available)
<b>Common uses (to treat conditions other than cancer)</b>	■ Rheumatoid arthritis, juvenile arthritis, psoriasis, multiple sclerosis, lupus, and other inflammatory muscle diseases
<b>Usual doses</b>	■ 7.5 mg to 30 mg weekly (higher doses are used only if treating cancer) ■ Weekly doses are taken as a single dose (for example, if your weekly dose is 7.5 mg, and each tablet contains 2.5 mg, you would take 3 tablets at the same time every week)
<b>What to do if you miss a dose</b>	■ Call your doctor for instructions if you miss a dose
<b>Special instructions and precautions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Your doctor may prescribe folic acid with methotrexate; your doctor may instruct you to skip the folic acid on the day you take methotrexate</li> <li>■ Avoid drinking alcohol while taking this medicine</li> <li>■ Do not take any new medicine unless approved by your doctor</li> <li>■ Causes sun sensitivity, so use sunscreen and protective eyewear and clothing</li> <li>■ Do not take with milk-rich foods</li> <li>■ This medicine may affect fertility in both men and women</li> </ul>
<b>Safety during pregnancy/breastfeeding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Do not take during pregnancy; may cause birth defects or loss of the unborn baby</li> <li>■ Do not take while breastfeeding</li> <li>■ Avoid pregnancy for at least 3 months following treatment (men who take methotrexate should protect women from pregnancy up until 3 months after taking their last dose)</li> </ul>
<b>Tell your doctor if you have:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Diseases: blood or bone marrow disorder (e.g., low white blood cell or platelet count, anemia), liver or kidney disease, peptic ulcer, ulcerative colitis, AIDS</li> <li>■ Conditions: drinking problem, weak immune system, are pregnant or trying to get pregnant</li> </ul>
<b>Storage and disposal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Store at room temperature and protect from light</li> <li>■ Keep the lid of the medicine tightly closed</li> <li>■ Dispose of the medicine securely in the trash</li> </ul>
<b>Side effects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Minimal side effects (nausea, vomiting, drowsiness) occur with low doses to treat psoriasis or rheumatoid arthritis</li> <li>■ Low-dose methotrexate has been associated with the rare development of cancerous lymphomas (tumors in lymph nodes)</li> <li>■ A very bad skin reaction (Stevens-Johnson syndrome) may happen; get medical help right away if you develop red, peeling, blistered skin; or sores in your mouth, nose, or throat</li> </ul>
<b>Side effects to report to your doctor immediately (usually seen when taking high doses)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Loose or black stools, mouth or tongue sores, skin rash, red or peeling skin, excessive fatigue or weakness, confusion, very bad dizziness, fever, chills, swollen face or tongue, trouble breathing, dry cough, rapid heartbeat, unusual bleeding or bruising, persistent stomach or back pain, change in how often you urinate</li> </ul>
<b>Nonprescription medicines/herbals/vitamins to avoid when taking methotrexate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents (e.g., ibuprofen [Motrin, Advil]) or aspirin</li> <li>■ Vitamins that contain folate, echinacea</li> </ul>
<b>Prescription medicines that should not be taken with methotrexate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Check with your doctor; <u>some</u> medicines that may be a problem include: vaccines, acitretin, cyclosporine, foscarnet, sulfonamides, tacrolimus, pimecrolimus, clozapine, carbamazepine</li> </ul>
<b>Special tests your doctor may prescribe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Blood tests may be prescribed every 1 to 4 months to make sure your kidneys and liver are functioning well and your body is making enough blood cells</li> </ul>