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Azathioprine and Mycophenolate Mofetil



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Which skin conditions are treated with azathioprine and mycophenolate mofetil (MMF)?

These drugs work by suppressing the activity of the body's immune system. They were initially developed for use in transplantation and cancer treatment. In low doses, they have been shown to be useful in skin conditions such as severe psoriasis, eczema, vasculitis and blistering skin diseases.

What doses should I take?

The dose for either drug depends on your weight. They are taken once or twice a day for 6 months or longer.

What are the possible side effects of azathioprine and mycophenolate mofetil (MMF)?

Common side effects include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, rashes and inflammation of the liver. However, they resolve when the drug is stopped.

The most important side effect of both drugs is suppression of the bone marrow, leading to reduced production of blood cells. This includes white blood cells which are the body's main defense against infection. All patients require regular blood tests (eg, full blood count, liver function tests), and should inform their doctor of any signs of infection (eg, fever, chills or sore throat), bleeding or bruising. Bone marrow suppression is uncommon and reversible if the drug is stopped.

Taking azathioprine or MMF at high doses for a number of years increases the risk of developing certain cancers. However, this is seen more frequently in patients with transplants. Talk to your doctor if you are worried.

How will I be monitored for the side effects of treatment?

Your doctor will arrange for regular blood tests. These will be carried out frequently and less often once the dose is stable.

Does azathioprine or MMF affect fertility or pregnancy?

It is best to avoid azathioprine or MMF when pregnant. If you are planning to have a family, or if you become pregnant while on these drugs, you should inform your doctor as soon as possible. You should avoid breast feeding while on these medications.

Can I take other medicines at the same time?

Azathioprine or MMF may be prescribed in combination with other drugs. However, some drugs may interact with them and you should always tell any doctor that you are taking azathioprine or MMF. Do not take over-the-counter preparations without discussing with your doctor first.

Can I have immunisation injections while on azathioprine or MMF?

You should avoid immunisations injections with any of the live vaccines such as polio and rubella (German measles). Flu vaccines and Pneumovax are safe.

Information provided by Department of Dermatology, Changi General Hospital