

Azathioprine & Mycophenolate Mofetil



Changi
General Hospital

SingHealth

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 dosage should I take?

The dose for either drug depends on your weight. They are taken once or twice a day for six 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 if you stop taking the drug.

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

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

The list of side effects/ risks/ complications mentioned above is not intended to be exhaustive. There may be uncommon risks that may also be applicable to the risk factors of an individual patient. Please ask your doctor for more information if you have any concerns.

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

Your doctor will arrange for regular blood tests. These will be carried out frequently and reduced once a stable dosage has been achieved.

Does azathioprine or MMF affect fertility or pregnancy?

It is best to avoid azathioprine or MMF when you are 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 also avoid breastfeeding while you are 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 your doctor that you are taking azathioprine or MMF. Do not take over-the-counter preparations without first discussing with your doctor.

Can I have immunisation injections while on azathioprine or MMF?

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



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