



Mercaptopurine (Purinethol®)

Patient Information Leaflet

This leaflet answers some common questions about Mercaptopurine. It does not contain all the available information. It also does not take the place of talking to your doctor or pharmacist.

What is Mercaptopurine used for?

Mercaptopurine is a medication used in the treatment of Ulcerative Colitis, Crohn's Disease and other rheumatological conditions. It belongs to a class of drugs known as immunosuppressants. It works by interfering with the DNA and RNA production. By interfering with DNA and RNA, Mercaptopurine reduces the activity of the immune system

When should it be taken?

Mercaptopurine should preferably be taken at the same time every day.

How should it be taken?

To maximise absorption of Mercaptopurine, it should be taken orally ONCE daily on empty stomach, i.e either 1 hour before or 2 hours after food. However, if you do experience stomach discomfort while taking Mercaptopurine, you may take it with food.

Do not stop taking Mercaptopurine unless you are told to do so by your doctor. Do not take more or less than required unless instructed.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If it is nearer to the time of your next dose, skip the missed dose. Do not take two doses at the same time.

Safe Handling

To minimise drug exposure to other members of the family, the following methods of administration are recommended:

1. Place tablets onto a spoon dedicated for use with Mercaptopurine and administer directly to the mouth. Avoid contact with fingers if possible and wash hands and the spoon thoroughly after taking Mercaptopurine.
2. **Pregnant or breastfeeding women** are advised to wear gloves as extra precaution where possible.
3. For patients who are unable to swallow tablets whole, it is advised to wet the tablets for a few minutes before grinding them to minimise the inhalation of medication powder.

What side effects can this medicine cause? What can I do about them?

You may experience the following side effects while on Mercaptopurine. Tell your doctor if you encounter any of them so that adjustments to your therapy may be made to reduce the occurrence of these side effects where possible. These include

- Diarrhea, nausea
- Alopecia (hair loss)
- Hyperpigmentation of the skin
- Mild skin rash

Please inform your doctor if you experience any other side effects or if the side effects become severe and bothersome.

These are some rare but potentially serious side effects that may be experienced when you using Mercaptopurine. These include:

- Bloody or black, tarry stools
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin and or whites of your eyes)
- Persistent fever, ulcers and sore throat
- Unusual bleeding or bruising
- Loss of appetite, pain in upper stomach
- Severe pain or swelling in joints

Stop using Mercaptopurine and inform your doctor immediately if you experience any of the potentially serious side effects.

Drugs or Food to avoid

Some medication or food may reduce its efficacy, or increase its toxicity. Do not give your child or yourself any other medications or herbal products without consulting your doctor or pharmacist.

These include:

1. Azathioprine
2. Methotrexate
3. Warfarin
4. Live vaccines, such as BCG, MMR and some forms of polio or influenza vaccines

Drugs commonly co-administered:

1. Cyclosporine
2. Corticosteroids, e.g Prednisolone
3. Sulfasalazine

Disclaimer: The list is not exhaustive, if in doubt, do inform your doctor or pharmacist especially if you are on any other medication or supplements when you are prescribed Mercaptopurine.

Storage

Store at a temperature below 25°C.

General Information

Compliance to follow up visits

While taking Mercaptopurine, you should be seeing your specialist doctor regularly to ensure that your treatment is optimized and to address any concerns relating to your treatment.

Regular laboratory tests may be conducted as directed by your doctor.

Supply of Drugs

You are advised not to purchase more Mercaptopurine than required before your next visit in case of dose changes or stoppage of medication.

Proper Disposal

You are advised to bring Mercaptopurine to the pharmacy for proper disposal if you are to stop the drug permanently

Caregiver advice

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, extra precaution should be taken when handling Mercaptopurine as it may cause harm to the developing foetus or baby.

Do not give Mercaptopurine to anyone else. It has been prescribed for a specific condition, may not be the correct treatment for another person, and would be dangerous if the other person is pregnant.