**Mercaptopurine (Purinethol®, or 6-Mercaptopurine)**

(“Mer kap toe PYOOR een”)

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**How drug is given:** by mouth

**Purpose:** to kill cancer cells in leukemia and lymphoma

**How to take the drug by mouth**

- Take this medication on an empty stomach (at least 1 hour before or 2 hours after food)

- Swallow each tablet whole; do not crush or chew them. If you are unable to swallow the tablet, the pharmacist will give you specific instructions.

- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your regular dosing schedule. **Do not double dose.**

- Wash hands after taking the medication. Avoid handling crushed or broken tablets.

**Storage**

- Store this medicine at room temperature, away from heat and moisture. Keep this medicine in its original container, out of reach of children and pets.

**Things that may occur during treatment**

1. Mild to moderate nausea, vomiting, and loss of appetite may occur. Drugs to help with this may be given to you.

2. Your blood cell counts may drop. This is known as bone marrow suppression. This includes a decrease in your:
   - Red blood cells, which carry oxygen in your body to help give you energy
   - White blood cells, which fight infection in your body
   - Platelets, which help clot the blood to stop bleeding

This may happen 7 to 14 days after the drug is given and then blood counts should return to normal. If you have a **fever of 100.5°F (38°C) or higher**, chills, a cough, or any bleeding problems, **tell your doctor or nurse right away.**
3. Loose stools or diarrhea may occur (after the drug is given) (within a few days after the drug is started). You may take loperamide (Imodium A-D®) to help control diarrhea. You may buy this at most drug stores. It is also important to drink more fluids (water, juice, sports drinks). If these do not help, tell your doctor or nurse.

4. Skin changes may happen. Your skin may turn darker.

5. You may get some hair thinning.

6. Women should not breast-feed while receiving 6-mercaptopurine.

7. You may get mouth sores 7 to 10 days after this drug is given. It is important to keep your mouth clean. A soft-bristle toothbrush should be used for brushing your teeth. You may have a burning feeling and redness inside the mouth or on the lips. Use a baking soda mouth rinse 4 or 5 times a day.

   **Mouth Rinse Recipe:**
   Mix: 1 tsp salt or baking soda with 8 oz. glass of water

Other mouth rinses may be ordered by your doctor. Do not use mouth washes that have alcohol in them because they will dry out the mouth. If you cannot eat or swallow because of this, let your doctor or nurse know. Check with your doctor before having any dental work done.

**Things that may occur after treatment ends (even months to years later)**

1. Fertility and Related Precautions:
   - It is still very important to use birth control if you are having sex, because this drug could be harmful to an unborn baby.
   - Men may become sterile and may want to think about sperm banking prior to chemotherapy.
   - For women, your period (menstrual cycle) may not be regular for a while or may stop completely and you may not be able to get pregnant.
   - Women should not breast-feed while receiving this drug.
   - If you are concerned about any of this, please talk with your doctor or nurse.

2. Your liver may be affected by this drug. In such cases, the skin might turn yellow and a yellow coloring may be seen in the whites of your eyes. You may have pain in your right side. You may feel more tired. If you have any of these symptoms, please let your doctor or nurse know right away.

*The above information includes some, but not necessarily all, of the possible side effects of this medication. The side effects in this teaching sheet may not be the same ones you experience. Your side effects may be different, depending on how often you receive treatment (your schedule) and how much you receive each time (your dosage). Side effects may also vary if you take other medications. Please talk*
with your doctor or nurse if you have questions about possible side effects you may experience. This document should not take the place of conversations with members of your health care team.

If you experience any significant change in your health during or after treatment, contact a member of your health care team right away.

Managing your oral chemotherapy schedule at home can be challenging. To help you with this, consider using tools to help you keep track of your schedule and any side effects you may have. You can find these tools online at www.dana-farber.org/OralChemoDiary.

THIS SPACE RESERVED FOR WRITTEN COMMENTS OR NOTES FOR THE PATIENT AND FAMILY: