



Chemotherapy: Methotrexate (Trexall®)

Pronounced: *"meth-oh-TREKs-ate"*

How drug is given: By mouth

Purpose: To treat leukemia, lymphoma, breast, sarcoma, lung, trophoblastic neoplasm, head and neck cancer, and other cancers; may also be used for treatment in other conditions (e.g., psoriasis, arthritis)

How to take the drug by mouth:

- Swallow each tablet whole; do not crush or chew them. If you have trouble swallowing 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 and disposal:

- Store at room temperature, away from heat and moisture.
- Keep this medicine in its original container, out of the reach of children and pets.
- If you have unused oral chemotherapy tablets or capsules, please return them to the pharmacy where the prescription was filled. Do not flush down the toilet, dump in the sink, or throw away in the trash.

Things that may occur during or within hours of treatment:

- Mild to moderate nausea, vomiting, and loss of appetite may occur. You may be given medicine to help with this.

Things that may occur a few days to weeks later:

- Loose stools or diarrhea may occur within a few days after the drug is started. You may take loperamide (Imodium A-D®) to help control diarrhea. You can buy this at most drug stores. It is also important to drink more fluids (water, juice, sports drinks). If these do not help within 24 hours, **call your cancer care team.**
- Your blood cell counts may drop. This is known as bone marrow suppression. This may happen 4 to 6 weeks after the drug is given and then blood counts should return to normal. This includes a decrease in:
 - 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

If you have a **fever of 100.5°F (38°C) or higher**, chills, a cough, or any bleeding problems, **call your cancer care team right away.**

- You may get mouth sores 7 to 10 days after this drug is given. It is important to keep your mouth clean. Use a soft-bristle toothbrush 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 mouthwashes that have alcohol in them because they will dry out the mouth. If you cannot eat or swallow because of mouth pain, tell your cancer care team. Check with your cancer care team before having any dental work done.

- Some of your hair may fall out with treatment. You may lose hair on your head as well as facial and body hair. Hair may grow back during treatment.
- You may see changes in your skin and nails. Sunlight may cause your skin to burn easier, so use a sunscreen of SPF 30 or greater when you go outside. Do not go to tanning booths.
- Some patients may feel very tired, also known as fatigue. You may need to rest or take naps more often. Mild to moderate exercise can also help you maintain your energy.
- You may feel pain or weakness in your joints or muscles. This may happen 2 to 3 days after you start Methotrexate. This usually gets better in a week. If these bother you, ask your cancer care team what type of drugs you may use to help with this pain.

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

- Long term treatment with methotrexate may cause liver damage, which may not get better. Talk with your doctor about drinking any alcohol while you are on this drug.

Sexual health and fertility

- It is very important to use birth control if you are having sex, because this drug could hurt 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.
- If you are concerned about any of this, please talk with your doctor or nurse.

Managing your oral chemotherapy schedule at home can be challenging. To help 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

METHOTREXATE

The information in this document includes some, but not necessarily all, of the possible side effects of this medication. The side effects listed here 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 are taking other medications. Please speak with your cancer care team if you have questions about possible side effects you may experience. This document should not take the place of conversations with members of your cancer care team.

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



Oral chemotherapy medicines are given by mouth in the form of capsules, tablets, or liquid. These safety tips will help you understand what to do when you are taking oral chemotherapy. **Please note:** If you are on a clinical trial, you may be given special instructions.

How to take this drug

- Swallow each tablet or capsule whole. Do not break, crush, or chew.
- Prepare your drug away from food and food prep areas.
- 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 the dose.
- If you are on a clinical trial, you will be given special instructions if you miss a dose.
- If you are unable to swallow the pill, speak with your nurse or pharmacist about other ways to take your medication.
- If you vomit or throw up your medication, call your physician for further instructions.
- Wash your hands after taking the medication. Avoid handling crushed or broken pills (tablets or capsules).

Storage

- Most oral chemotherapy medicine is stored at room temperature, away from excess heat and moisture. You will be told if the medication you are taking needs special storage or handling.
- Keep this medicine in its original container, in a safe place, away from other family medications. All medications need to be kept out of the reach of children and pets.

Disposal

- If you have unused oral chemotherapy pills (tablets or capsules), please return them to the pharmacy where the prescription was filled. Do not flush down the toilet, dump in the sink, or throw away in the trash.

Safe handling of body waste in the home after chemotherapy

- Chemotherapy stays in the body for hours or even days, and is found in vomit, urine, stool, and sweat (body wastes). Special care must be taken to prevent the patient's body waste from coming into accidental contact with the patient or caregiver.

Body wastes

Patient and caregiver:

- You can use the toilet (septic tank or city sewage) as usual. There is no research to support double flushing to prevent accidental contact (although this may be suggested for certain medications). Ask your doctor or nurse what they suggest for your medication.
- Wash your hands well with soap and water after using the toilet. If urine, vomit, or stool gets on your body, wash with soap and water. Always wear gloves when cleaning equipment or disposing waste from a urinal or commode.
- Pregnant caregivers should **not** handle patient body waste.
- It is safe for family and friends to use the same toilet, as long as all body waste is cleaned from the toilet.
- To absorb urine or stool, use a disposable, plastic-backed pad, diaper, or sheet. Change it immediately when soiled. Then wash skin with soap and water.
- If you have an ostomy, you or your caregiver may want to wear gloves when emptying or changing appliances.

Laundry

- Always wear disposable gloves when handling sheets or clothes that have been soiled with body waste.
- Soiled items should be kept and washed separately from the other laundry.

Oral chemotherapy is a serious drug that requires extra caution. If you have questions or concerns about your oral chemotherapy, do not hesitate to call your clinician. For more tips, tools and short videos to help you manage oral chemotherapy visit our web page at <http://www.dana-farber.org/oralchemo>