

METHOTREXATE TREATMENT FOR YOUR HYDATIDIFORM MOLE



the women's
the royal women's hospital
victoria australia

This information is for patients who have been diagnosed with a molar pregnancy (hydatidiform mole) and need to have treatment with methotrexate.

What is methotrexate?

Methotrexate is a medicine used in chemotherapy which stops the rapid growth of the hydatidiform mole.

How is methotrexate given?

Methotrexate is given as an injection into a muscle on every second day for one week. You will also be given folic acid tablets to be taken 30 hours after each methotrexate injection. It is very important to take folic acid as prescribed because it helps to protect you from some of the side effects of methotrexate treatment. After one week of treatment is completed, you will have a week without treatment. This cycle of treatment is repeated every two weeks and several cycles of treatment may be required.

Testing your hCG level

Human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) is a hormone monitored between each methotrexate cycle. Using a blood or urine test, your hCG level will be monitored to check that it is decreasing. Treatment will continue until your hCG level becomes normal then three consolidation cycles are given. Once your treatment is completed, you will be followed up through the hydatidiform mole registry, with hCG levels monitored weekly for four weeks and then monthly for 12 months.

Are there any side effects?

Some common side effects include:

- Increased risk of infection

White blood cells help to fight infection. During treatment, the number of white blood cells can reduce, increasing the risk of infection

- Nausea and vomiting

Try to drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration. Anti-nausea medicines can be provided if needed

- Abdominal pain or cramps

Abdominal pain may occur as the molar pregnancy resolves. Paracetamol (Panadol®) can help with pain relief and is available from your local pharmacy without a prescription; check with your pharmacist if this is right for you

- Sensitive skin

Methotrexate can cause your skin to become more sensitive to sunlight. Ensure you use sunscreen, wear protective clothing and avoid excessive sun exposure during treatment.

- Mouth ulcers

Your mouth may become dry and sore during treatment and mouth ulcers may develop. Using a soft bristle toothbrush and rinsing your mouth with sodium bicarbonate mouthwash after meals can help to prevent and treat mouth ulcers.

To make the mouthwash, dissolve one teaspoon of sodium bicarbonate (baking soda)

in a glass of warm water.

- **Dry eyes:** Your eyes may feel dry or irritated during treatment with methotrexate. Lubricating eye drops can be used and are available from your local pharmacy without a prescription.

Contact your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice if you experience or are concerned by any of these side effects.

Can I have sex during my treatment?

You can have sex during treatment. It is recommended to use condoms for at least seven days after treatment is completed to protect your partner from the effects of methotrexate.

Vaginal dryness may occur and intercourse may become difficult or painful. Lubricating products may help with these symptoms and are available from your local pharmacy.

How long do I need to use contraception for?

Methotrexate can have harmful effects on a developing foetus. It is important to avoid getting pregnant during and for a period of time after treatment. You should use effective contraception for at least three months after methotrexate treatment has been completed.

Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about the different contraceptive options available.

What should be avoided during treatment with methotrexate?

Anti-inflammatory medicines such as ibuprofen (Nurofen®), diclofenac (Voltaren®) and aspirin can increase the risk of side effects from methotrexate. Avoid taking these medications during your methotrexate treatment and for one week after your treatment has finished.

Products containing folic acid, including multivitamins, can reduce the effectiveness of treatment with methotrexate. Avoid products with folic acid during your treatment (this is

different from the folinic acid you will be prescribed as part of your treatment).

Alcohol can increase the risk of side effects from methotrexate. Avoid drinking alcohol during treatment with methotrexate and for one week after your treatment has finished.

Check with your pharmacist before starting any new medicines or supplements.

Special precautions

Methotrexate can remain in body fluids (vomit, urine and faeces) for up to seven days after your treatment is completed. Take special care for seven days after your treatment to reduce the chance of others being exposed to methotrexate during your treatment and over this period.

- After using the toilet, close the lid and flush on full flush.
- If body fluids splash on the toilet, wear gloves and clean the area with soap and water before others use the toilet. Dispose of gloves after each use.
- Use gloves if handling clothing or linen with your body fluids on them. Wash these items straight away, separately from other items, on the longest washing machine cycle.
- If you vomit into a bowl, wash it out afterwards with water and detergent. Don't use that bowl for anything else and throw it away when your treatment is finished.

Important: When to contact the hospital

Contact the hospital immediately if you have any of these symptoms:

- A temperature of 38°C or higher
- Chest pain, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, or a dry cough
- Severe abdominal pain

Where to get more information

About methotrexate

Royal Women's Hospital Medicines Information Line

T: (03) 8345 3190

Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays)

9am - 4pm

About your treatment

Gynaecology Clinic Coordinator (nurse)

T: (03) 8345 3577

Gynaecology Fellow (doctor) through the
hospital switchboard

T: (03) 8345 2000

About hydatidiform mole (molar pregnancy)

Check our website at

www.thewomens.org.au/wm-hydatidiform

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