

## Azathioprine Patient Information Leaflet

The leaflet aims to answer your questions about taking Azathioprine to treat your autoimmune condition in which your body's immune system attacks your own body. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor, nurse or pharmacist caring for you.

### What is Azathioprine and what is it used for

Azathioprine is an immunosuppressant. It reduces the strength of your immune system to treat autoimmune conditions. These conditions can fluctuate between periods of remission (few or no symptoms) and flare-ups (worsening symptoms). Azathioprine helps to prevent flare-ups and helps to control or reduce symptoms. Further information can be found in the information leaflet supplied by the manufacturer or from your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

### How to take your Azathioprine tablets

The dose of Azathioprine is based on your body weight and the most effective dose to treat your condition will be calculated by your doctor. It works slowly and can take up to several weeks to take full effect. Your doctor will be monitoring your response to the medication and if there is no improvement after a few months they may consider stopping the medication

The tablet(s) should be taken once a day with, or soon after food (it may cause irritation if taken on an empty stomach). Swallow the tablets whole. Do not break, chew or crush the tablets.

Do **not** take Azathioprine if you:

- are allergic to Azathioprine, 6-Mercaptopurine or any of its excipients
- are pregnant or breast feeding
- have significant kidney or liver problems
- have an active infection

### What to do if you forget to take the medicine

If it is within 12 hours of your normal dose you should take it as soon as you remember. If it is more than 12 hours since your dose was due do not take the dose and take your next dose at the normal time. Never take two doses at any one time. Contact your doctor if you take more than your normal dose of Azathioprine.

### Taking other medicines with Azathioprine

Azathioprine can interact with other medicines such as Allopurinol (used to treat gout), Trimethoprim and Co-trimoxazole (antibiotics). It is important to tell your doctor other medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medication or herbal remedies, before starting Azathioprine therapy.

## Possible side effects

Most people don't have side effects, and everyone reacts differently to medication. However, if you have any concerns about your symptoms contact your doctor or pharmacist.

Azathioprine may cause loss of appetite, rash, sickness, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, reversible hair loss and sensitivity to sunlight. These side effects usually improve as you become use to the medication.

The effect of Azathioprine on the blood is rare but it weakens your immune system and therefore increases your risk of infection. If you develop any signs of illness or side effects such as infection, unexplained bruising, bleeding, sore throat or mouth ulcers, fever or malaise contact your doctor or pharmacist immediately. Additionally, if you have not had chickenpox and come in close contact with anyone who has chicken pox or shingles contact your doctor.

## Monitoring requirements when taking Azathioprine

Azathioprine can affect your blood cells, kidneys, and your liver. Your doctor will periodically carry out blood tests to ensure your new medication is not causing you any problems. Initially, in most cases, blood tests are carried out every 2 to 4 weeks then every 2 to 3 months after the first few months.

## Vaccinations whilst taking Azathioprine

The use of 'live' vaccines should be avoided whilst on azathioprine as there is an increased risk of infection.

**The Covid-19 vaccines** offered in the UK do not contain live viruses – the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and Moderna vaccines **do not contain any live virus**. The Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine uses a harmless, weakened adenovirus that has been genetically changed so that it is impossible for it to cause an illness.

## How to get a further supply of Azathioprine

Contact your GP if you need more medication.

## How to store Azathioprine tablets

Do not use after the expiry date stated on the label. Do not store above 25°C. Protect from light.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your medication, please contact Pharmacy Medicines Information Centre on 020 8725 1033 (Monday to Friday 9.15 am to 5 pm).

## Additional services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

[Help and advice - St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust \(stgeorges.nhs.uk\)](https://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### NHS

[NHS UK](https://www.nhs.uk) provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

### NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency.

[NHS 111](https://www.nhs.uk) is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111

### Document History

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