

# Azathioprine



## What is azathioprine?

- An immunosuppressant that is used to control symptoms and prevent flare-ups in diseases of the immune system such as vasculitis (inflammation in the blood vessels) or glomerulonephritis (inflammation of the kidneys).
- Azathioprine lowers your body's harmful response to diseases of the immune system. It is often used with other medications such as prednisone.
- Azathioprine is available as 50 mg tablets.

## How do I use it?

- Take the medication regularly once daily.
- The medication can be taken with or without food. Take with food if it causes upset stomach.

## What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember.
- If it is close to the time of your next dose, skip it and go back to your normal schedule.
- Do not "double-up" the dose as this may increase side effects.
- It is very important to take each dose of azathioprine because missing even a few doses may cause flare-ups of symptoms.
- The dose of azathioprine is based on your weight and is specific to your medical condition. Do not change your dose without talking to your doctor or pharmacist.

## What side effects should I expect?

- Check your blood work regularly; this is important to detect and minimize the side effects of azathioprine.
- Common side effects include nausea, upset stomach or diarrhea. These side effects may decrease by having smaller meals more often. If any of these symptoms continue or become bothersome, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
- Azathioprine may decrease the production of white blood cells and platelets in the body. Contact your doctor if you notice any bleeding or easy bruising.
- Since azathioprine lowers your body's ability to fight off infections, wash your hands often and stay away from people with infections, colds or flu. Contact your doctor right away if you feel you may have a cold or other infection, e.g. if you experience high fever, chills, very bad sore throat, chest congestion, pain with passing urine, etc.
- Azathioprine may increase your chance of getting cancers such as lymphoma, skin cancer or other types. Avoid sun, sunlamps, and tanning beds. Use sunscreen and wear clothing and eyewear that protect you from the sun. Contact your family doctor to ensure you have the recommended screening tests performed for people of your age and sex.

## Drug interactions with azathioprine

- Azathioprine can interact with some medications.
- You should discuss with your doctor

or pharmacist before starting any new medications (non prescription and prescription), herbal products or vitamins.

- Do not receive any vaccines without talking to your doctor because the use with azathioprine may either increase your chance of an infection or make the vaccine not work as well.

### **Is azathioprine harmful during pregnancy?**

- Azathioprine readily crosses the placenta into the bloodstream of the fetus.
- The risk of azathioprine use during pregnancy should be reviewed carefully by and discussed with your doctor (ideally before pregnancy).
- Azathioprine is transferred into the breast milk, therefore breastfeeding is not recommended.

### **How do I store the medication?**

- Store at room temperature away from moisture and sunlight. Do not store in the bathroom. Keep out of reach of children.

### **Reordering procedure**

- To refill your medication, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.