

Methotrexate (MTX) Therapy for Skin Conditions

Your health care provider has decided that treatment with methotrexate (meth-oh-TREX-ate) may help your skin condition.

What is methotrexate (MTX)?

- The cells in your body that fight infection and inflammation (swelling) are part of your **immune system**. If your immune system is too active, it can cause inflammation and damage to your body tissues and organs (like the skin).
- Diseases that cause your immune system to be too active include:
 - › Psoriasis
 - › Psoriatic arthritis
 - › Severe (very bad) eczema
 - › Other autoimmune skin diseases
- MTX is an immunosuppressive medication. This means it suppresses (weakens) your body's immune system response, which lowers inflammation.
- MTX works by blocking an enzyme involved in your immune system, which makes your immune system less active.

How long will it take to work?

- It may take 6 to 8 weeks before your symptoms get better.

Who should not take MTX?

- **Do not take MTX if you have:**
 - › Liver disease
 - › Low blood counts or blood problems
 - › Stomach ulcers
 - › Chronic lung disease
 - › Chronic kidney disease

Tell your health care provider if you have had any of these conditions.

- **Do not take MTX if you are pregnant, plan to get pregnant, or if you are breastfeeding or chestfeeding.**
 - › MTX can harm an unborn baby, and can cause birth defects or miscarriage.
 - › Tell your health care provider if you are pregnant, or plan to get pregnant before taking MTX.
- Talk to your health care provider about birth control before taking MTX.

How do I take MTX?

- MTX can be taken orally (by mouth) as a pill, or by injection (needle).
- It is taken once every 7 days (1 week), on the same day each week.
- Take it with folic acid. Your health care provider will talk with you about this.

What are the possible side effects?

Less serious side effects

- You may have nausea (upset stomach), not feel well, or feel tired for 24 to 48 hours (1 to 2 days) after taking MTX.
 - › This usually gets better over time as you get used to the medication.
- Mouth sores
 - › Taking folic acid can help.

These side effects usually go away as soon as you stop taking the medication.

Serious side effects

- **If you have any of these side effects, tell your health care provider right away:**
 - › Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
 - › Abnormal bleeding or bruising (like bleeding or bruising easily)
 - › Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes)
 - › Infection
 - › Pneumonitis (lung inflammation), new dry cough, trouble breathing, shortness of breath (while at rest)

If you have any of these side effects, your health care provider may lower your dose (amount), or tell you to stop taking MTX.

What can I do to lower the chance of side effects?

- **Avoid alcohol.** Drinking alcohol while taking MTX can damage your liver and lead to cirrhosis (scarring of the liver).
- **Talk to your health care provider before you get any live vaccines. This does not include flu or COVID shots.**
- **Do not start taking any new medications without talking to your health care provider first.** Some medications (like sulfa antibiotics [Septra[®] or trimethoprim]) can cause problems when taken at the same time as MTX.
- Tell your health care provider if you have any allergies or infections.
- **Take a folate supplement** (folic acid or vitamin B9). This can help to lower how severe and frequent your side effects are. It also helps protect your liver. Your health care provider will tell you how much folate to take.
- **Have regular blood tests** to check the effect of MTX on your body, and in treating your condition.

Concerns

- You may be worried that this medication is too dangerous. Serious side effects are **rare**. There is less risk from the medication than there is from your condition.
- **Call your dermatologist if you:**
 - › Want to stop or have already stopped taking MTX
 - › Plan to have surgery
 - › Are planning to get pregnant

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