

Read this important information before taking:

Methotrexate

Brought to you by the Institute for Safe Medication Practices



[Extra care is needed because methotrexate is a high-alert medicine.]

High-alert medicines have been proven to be safe and effective. But these medicines can cause serious injury if a mistake happens while taking them. This means that it is very important for you to know about this medicine and take it exactly as directed.

When receiving a prescription



□ **Look for the reason.** Ask your doctor to put the reason for your medicine on all prescriptions. You might take a medicine like methotrexate daily for a week at a time if you have cancer, but just once or twice a week if you have arthritis or psoriasis (or certain other conditions). If the pharmacist knows your condition, he or she will make sure the directions for taking your medicine are correct.



Ask for special packaging. Ask your doctor if the medicine comes in a special package designed for weekly use. For example, **Rheumatrex**, one brand of methotrexate, comes in a weekly dose pack. Never leave the doctor's office unless you clearly understand how to take your medicine.



□ 3 Disclose all medicines. Tell your doctor about all prescription, nonprescription, and herbal products you take, particularly ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), aspirin, echinacea, and vitamins.



Avoid during pregnancy or breastfeeding. Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant. Methotrexate may cause birth defects or death of the unborn fetus if taken during pregnancy. Avoid pregnancy for at least 3 months following treatment with methotrexate. Do not take this medicine while breastfeeding, as it may reduce your infant's ability to fight infections.

When dropping off a prescription



□ **6 Pick a day(s).** Pick the day(s) of the week that you'll be taking your medicine, and ask your pharmacist to include that in the instructions.

When picking up your prescription



□ **6** Ask for education. Ask the pharmacist to go over the directions for taking the medicine. Be sure it agrees with what the doctor told you.

When taking your medicine



Take weekly, not daily. Never take the medicine daily for more than 1 consecutive week.



□ Never take extra doses. Do not take extra doses for symptom relief. Relief of symptoms is gradual and begins in 3 to 6 weeks after starting the medicine. Continued improvement occurs during the first 12 weeks of taking the medicine.



Avoid direct sunlight. Methotrexate causes an abnormal skin reaction if you are exposed to sunlight. You could develop severe redness, pain, and peeling of the skin. If you are in the sun, use sunscreen on your skin and wear eye protection and a hat.



□ **®** Report side effects. Let your doctor know about any side effects you experience, particularly a rash, fever, chills, trouble breathing, cough, racing heartbeat, bleeding, and changes in how often you urinate.

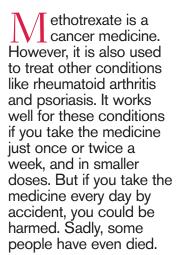
STOP

DO NOT TAKE THIS MEDICINE EVERY DAY!

Fatal errors have happened when methotrexate was prescribed, dispensed, and/or taken daily instead of once or twice a week. Treatment for rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis (or other certain conditions) requires just one to three doses (12 hours apart) taken each week.

Methotrexate

Once a day is not the way!



Topics

In several instances, this happened because people misread the directions on the prescription bottle.

In one case, a man with arthritis mistakenly took one tablet each morning, but the

directions said to take one tablet each <u>Monday</u>. In another case, the prescription label said to

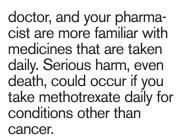
Fast Facts

take the medicine every 12 hours for just three doses. But a woman took the medicine every 12 hours for 6 days in a row.

Another man took many extra doses to help relieve arthritis pain—something that should

never be done.

Harmful mistakes may happen because you, your



See the **Top 10 List of Safety Tips** on the other side of this page to help you avoid mistakes when taking methotrexate less often than daily.

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methotrexate (pronounced meth o TREKS ate) (generic available)
■ Rheumatrex and Trexall
■ Yes
■ Cancer, psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis
■ Crohn's disease, ectopic (tubal) pregnancy
 No more than three tablets (each taken 12 hours apart), or a total dose of 20 to 25 mg each week for treatment of psoriasis and arthritis Higher doses are used only if treating cancer
 Typically taken once or twice each week Do not take daily for more than 1 consecutive week Avoid alcohol Do not take any new medicine unless approved by your doctor Causes sun sensitivity, so use sunscreen and protective eyewear and clothing Do not take with milk-rich foods
 Do not take during pregnancy; may cause birth defects Do not take while breastfeeding Avoid pregnancy for at least 3 months following treatment
■ Liver or kidney disease, AIDS, certain blood or bone marrow disorders
■ Peptic ulcer disease or ulcerative colitis
 Store at room temperature and protect from light Avoid touching the tablets with your hands as much as possible Dispose of the medicine securely in the trash
 Minimal side effects occur with low doses to treat psoriasis or rheumatoid arthritis Possible side effects include: nausea, vomiting, drowsiness Low-dose methotrexate has been associated with the rare development of cancerous lymphomas (tumors in lymph nodes)
■ Rash, excessive fatigue, mental confusion, fever, chills, mouth sores, shortness of breath, dry cough, rapid heartbeat or palpitations, unusual bleeding or bruising, black stools, persistent stomach disturbances, change in how often you urinate
■ Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents (e.g., ibuprofen [Motrin, Advil]) or aspirin ■ Vitamins that contain folate, echinacea
■ Check with your doctor; <u>some</u> of the medicines that may be a problem include: acitretin, cyclosporine, sulfonamides, trimethoprim, vaccines, clozapine, carbamazepine
■ Blood tests may be prescribed every 1 to 4 months to make sure your kidneys and liver are functioning well and your body is making enough blood cells

