

LOW-DOSE METHOTREXATE FOR CROHN'S DISEASE

Crohn's disease is a long-term condition that causes inflammation in the digestive system. This leads to symptoms such as abdominal pain and diarrhoea.

Use this action plan to discuss methotrexate with your gastroenterologist and plan the best way to take your medicine.

Methotrexate acts to control the disease

Methotrexate does more than just relieve the symptoms of Crohn's disease.

It is a type of medicine called an immunomodulator. This means it works by interrupting the activity of the immune system to reduce inflammation in the bowel.

Methotrexate:

- ▶ keeps symptoms under long-term control (called remission)
- ▶ prevents flares
- ▶ decreases the need for glucocorticoids (also known as corticosteroids or steroids)
- ▶ reduces the chance of complications caused by uncontrolled inflammation.



Methotrexate is usually taken as a tablet, but can also be an injection under your skin (subcutaneous) or into your muscle (intra-muscular), once a week.

Compared with tablets, methotrexate injections



are more effective, and



may cause fewer side effects.

Focus on facts

Myths about methotrexate can be barriers to treatment. Knowing the facts helps people stick to their treatment and improves results.

Fact Methotrexate is safe and effective at low doses for Crohn's disease – it's not considered chemotherapy at these doses.	Fact Methotrexate takes time to work – you might not feel better for 6–12 weeks.	Fact Methotrexate injections can be safely given by yourself, or a friend or family member.	Fact People taking methotrexate for Crohn's disease can safely make physical contact with pregnant women.
Myth Low-dose methotrexate is chemotherapy.	Myth You will notice the benefits of methotrexate straight away.	Myth Giving yourself methotrexate injections is unsafe.	Myth People taking methotrexate cannot be near pregnant women.

Ongoing care

Blood tests

Regular blood tests are used to check treatment is working and monitor for side effects, measuring kidney and liver function, and doing a full blood count. Over time, these tests are needed less often.

Clinical review

Continue regular reviews of your Crohn's disease. How often depends on how active the disease is.

Vaccinations

Keep your pneumococcal and influenza vaccinations up to date.

Skin checks

Methotrexate can slightly increase the risk of some forms of skin cancer. Annual skin checks are recommended for adults.

Reproductive health

You should seek specialist advice if you plan to have children. Women should use birth control while taking methotrexate, stop methotrexate 3 months before planning a pregnancy, and avoid breastfeeding while on methotrexate.

Name:

Date:

TAKING LOW-DOSE METHOTREXATE

Share this action plan with your healthcare team to help you achieve your treatment goals.

When I take my medicines			
	When	Day of the week	Dose mg
Methotrexate	Once a week		
Folic acid <i>Taking folic acid can help reduce the side effects of methotrexate</i>	On different days of the week from methotrexate		

Next review due: _____

Other medicines I take for Crohn's disease

Side effects of methotrexate

Like all medicines, methotrexate may cause side effects.

Most common side effects include:

- ▶ nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- ▶ mouth ulcers
- ▶ increased skin sensitivity to the sun.
- ▶ tiredness, headache and feeling foggy.

Talk to your doctor if you are concerned. Side effects may be reduced by taking methotrexate with food or in the evening.

When to contact my doctor

Urgently

If I develop any new infections. Signs of infection include fever, and red or painful skin or wounds.

If I develop breathing difficulties and/or a dry cough.

Stop taking this medicine until you speak to your doctor.

As soon as possible

If I experience a flare-up of my Crohn's disease.

Regularly

To make appointments for routine tests to monitor my disease and medicines.

To check that I am up to date with my vaccines and seek advice for travel vaccines.

If I am taking or plan to take any other medicines, including over-the-counter, herbal and naturopathic medicines.

Further information

Crohn's & Colitis Australia crohnsandcolitis.com.au

Gastroenterological Society of Australia gesa.org.au

The Australian Rheumatology Association rheumatology.org.au

▶ [Information about how to safely inject methotrexate](#)

▶ [A video about how to give yourself an injection of methotrexate](#)

NPS MedicineWise (nps.org.au)

Download the [MedicineWise app](#) to keep track of your medicines and access health information such as blood test results. (medicinewiseapp.com.au)

NPS Medicines Line: **1300 633 424**



+ TARGETED THERAPIES ALLIANCE

Helping consumers and health professionals make safe and wise therapeutic decisions about biological disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (bDMARDs) and other specialised medicines. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health through the Value in Prescribing bDMARDs Program Grant.

