



Provincial Health Services Authority

For the Patient: Mercaptopurine
Other names: PURINETHOL®

- Mercaptopurine (mer-cap-toe-POOR-een) is a drug that is used to treat some types of leukemia. It is a tablet that you take by mouth.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to mercaptopurine before taking mercaptopurine.
- **Blood tests** may be taken regularly during treatment. The dose and timing of your treatment may be changed based on the test results and/or other side effects.
- It is important to take mercaptopurine exactly as directed by your doctor. Make sure you understand the directions. Take mercaptopurine at the **same time** each day.
- It is best to take mercaptopurine on an **empty stomach**. You may take it with food if needed.
- **It is best to avoid taking mercaptopurine at the same time as milk or milk-based products.** You may take it with milk or milk-based products if needed.
- If you **vomit** within 1 hour of taking mercaptopurine, check with your doctor during office hours. You will be told whether to take the dose again or to wait until the next scheduled dose.
- If you **miss a dose** of mercaptopurine, take it as soon as you can if it is within 12 hours of the missed dose. If it is over 12 hours since your missed dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your usual dosing times.
- Your doctor may tell you to **drink** extra fluids so that you will pass more urine. This will help prevent kidney problems.
- Other drugs such as allopurinol (PURINOL®, ZYLOPRIM®) and warfarin (COUMADIN®) may **interact** with mercaptopurine. Tell your doctor if you are taking these or any other drugs as you may need extra blood tests or your dose may need to be changed. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any new drugs.
- Talk to your doctor before receiving any **immunizations**.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of mercaptopurine.

- It is not known if mercaptopurine causes **sterility** in men or **menopause** in women. If you plan to have children, discuss this with your doctor before being treated with mercaptopurine.
- Mercaptopurine may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with mercaptopurine. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.
- **Store** mercaptopurine tablets out of the reach of children, at room temperature, away from heat, light, and moisture.
- **Tell** doctors or dentists that you are being treated with mercaptopurine before you receive any treatment from them.

Changes in blood counts

This drug may cause temporary changes in your blood counts. Your doctor will be following these changes carefully by performing blood tests. Adjustment of your treatment may be needed in certain circumstances.

BLOOD COUNTS	MANAGEMENT
Normal white blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. When white blood cells are low, you are at greater risk of having an infection.	To help prevent infection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often and always after using the bathroom. • Avoid crowds and people who are sick. • Call your doctor immediately at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.

BLOOD COUNTS	MANAGEMENT
Normal platelets help your blood to clot normally after an injury (e.g., cut). When the platelet count is low, you may be more likely to bruise or bleed.	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not to bruise, cut, or burn yourself. • Clean your nose by blowing gently. Do not pick your nose. • Avoid constipation. • Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily. <p>Some medications such as ASA (e.g., ASPIRIN®) or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) may increase your risk of bleeding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., ASA for your heart). • For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) first, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable.

Side effects are listed in the following table in the order in which they may occur. Tips to help manage the side effects are included. Mercaptopurine is **usually well tolerated** and serious side effects are rare.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Nausea does not usually occur with mercaptopurine.	
Skin rashes may rarely occur.	<p>To help itching:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can use calamine lotion. • If very irritating, call your doctor during office hours. • Otherwise make sure to mention it at your next visit.
Sore mouth may rarely occur. Mouth sores can occur on the tongue, the sides of the mouth, or in the throat. Mouth sores or bleeding gums can lead to an infection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brush your teeth gently after eating and at bedtime with a very soft toothbrush. If your gums bleed, use gauze instead of a brush. Use baking soda instead of toothpaste. • Make a mouthwash with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda or salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day. • Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Try with a Sore Mouth.*</i>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Hair loss is rare with mercaptopurine. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with mercaptopurine. Colour and texture may change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a gentle shampoo and soft brush. • Care should be taken with use of hair spray, bleaches, dyes, and perms.
Darkening of the skin may rarely occur in some areas such as your hands, elbows, and knees.	This will slowly return to normal once you stop treatment with mercaptopurine.

*Please ask your chemotherapy nurse or pharmacist for a copy.

STOP TAKING MERCAPTOPURINE AND SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), shaking chills; cough, severe sore throat, productive cough (coughing up thick or green sputum); cloudy or foul smelling urine; painful, tender, or swollen red skin wounds or sores.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black, tarry stools; blood in urine; pinpoint red spots on skin; extensive bruising.
- Signs of an **allergic reaction** (rare), including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling, or breathing problems.
- **Severe abdominal pain.**

SEE YOUR DOCTOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Signs of **kidney problems** such as lower back or side pain, swelling of feet or lower legs.
- Signs of **gout** such as joint pain.
- Trouble in **walking**.

CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONTINUE OR BOTHER YOU:

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Easy bruising or minor bleeding.
- Redness, swelling, pain, or sores on your lips, tongue, mouth, or throat.
- Skin rash or itching.

REPORT ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS TO YOUR DOCTOR