UPMC | HILLMAN CANCER CENTER

Mercaptopurine

About This Medicine

Mercaptopurine is used to treat cancer. It is given by mouth (orally).

Possible Side Effects

- Bone marrow suppression. This is a decrease in the number of white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets. This may raise your risk of infection, make you tired and weak, and raise your risk of bleeding.
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up)
- Diarrhea (loose bowel movements)
- Decreased appetite (decreased hunger)
- General discomfort, a feeling of being unwell
- Rash

Note: *All possible side effects are not included. Your side effects may be different depending on your cancer diagnosis, condition, or if you are receiving other medicines in combination. Please discuss any concerns or questions with your medical team.*

Warnings and Precautions

- Changes in your liver function, which may be life-threatening
- Severe bone marrow depression, which may be life-threatening
- Decrease immune function, which increases your risk of infection
- This medicine may raise your risk of getting a second cancer, such as lymphoma, skin cancers, sarcomas and uterine cervical cancer.
- Hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis - an immune reaction that can cause damage to blood cells in your bone marrow and any organs in your body, which can be life-threatening. You may have a higher risk of developing this condition if you have a history of an autoimmune disorder, especially inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

Note: *Some of the side effects above are very rare. If you have concerns and/or questions, please discuss them with your medical team.*

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Important Information

- This medicine is available in tablets and oral suspension. Do not use them interchangeably.
- Talk to your doctor before receiving any vaccinations during your treatment. Some vaccinations are not recommended while receiving mercaptopurine.

How to Take Your Medicine

- **Tablets**: Swallow the medicine whole, consistently with or without food. Tell your doctor and/or nurse if you have trouble swallowing the tablets.
- **Oral Suspension**: Shake bottle vigorously for 30 second prior to using. If using a syringe for dispensing, ensure the syringe is cleaned with soap and water, rinse and dried well in between usage. Once the bottle has been opened, it should be used within 8 weeks.
- **Missed dose:** If you vomit or miss a dose, contact your doctor for further instructions. Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.
- **Handling**: Wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling your medicine, your caretakers should not handle your medicine with bare hands and should wear latex gloves.
- Cytotoxic medicines leave the body through urine and stool, but they can also be present in other body fluids such as blood, vomit, semen, and vaginal fluids. Take precautions to prevent others from coming in contact with your medicine or your body fluids. Follow safety precautions during your treatment and for as long as directed by your health care provider after your treatment. If you take a cytotoxic pill each day, follow these precautions every day.
- If you get any oral suspension on your skin or in your eyes, you should wash the area of the skin well with soap and water right away. Wash your eyes with flowing water and call your doctor. Call your doctor if you get a skin reaction.
- **Storage**: Store tablets and oral suspension in the original container at room temperature, in a dry place. Keep the lid tightly closed.
- **Disposal of unused medicine:** Do not flush any expired and/or unused medicine down the toilet or drain unless you are specifically instructed to do so on the medicine label. Some facilities have take-back programs and/or other options. If you do not have a take-back program in your area, then please discuss with your nurse or your doctor how to dispose of unused medicine.

Treating Side Effects

- Manage tiredness by pacing your activities for the day.
- Be sure to include periods of rest between energy-draining activities.
- To decrease the risk of infection, wash your hands regularly.
- Avoid close contact with people who have a cold, the flu, or other infections.
- Take your temperature as your doctor or nurse tells you, and whenever you feel like you may have a fever.
- To help decrease the risk of bleeding, use a soft toothbrush. Check with your nurse before using dental floss.
- Be very careful when using knives or tools.
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor.
- Drink enough fluids to keep your urine pale yellow.

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- If you throw up or have diarrhea, you should drink more fluids so that you do not become dehydrated (lack of water in the body from losing too much fluid).
- To help with nausea and vomiting, eat small, frequent meals instead of three large meals a day. Choose foods and drinks that are at room temperature. Ask your nurse or doctor about other helpful tips and medicine that is available to help stop or lessen these symptoms.
- If you have diarrhea, eat low-fiber foods that are high in protein and calories and avoid foods that can irritate your digestive tracts or lead to cramping.
- Ask your nurse or doctor about medicine that can lessen or stop your diarrhea.
- To help with decreased appetite, eat small, frequent meals. Eat foods high in calories and protein, such as meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, tofu, eggs, nuts, milk, yogurt, cheese, ice cream, pudding, and nutritional supplements.
- Consider using sauces and spices to increase taste. Daily exercise, with your doctor's approval, may increase your appetite.
- If you get a rash do not put anything on it unless your doctor or nurse says you may. Keep the area around the rash clean and dry. Ask your doctor for medicine if your rash bothers you.
- Use sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher when you are outdoors even for a short time. Cover up when you are out in the sun. Wear wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved shirts, and pants. Keep your neck, chest, and back covered.

Food and Medicine Interactions

- There are no known interactions of mercaptopurine with food.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist about all other prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements (vitamins, minerals, herbs, and others) you are taking before starting this medicine as there are known medicine interactions with mercaptopurine. Also, check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new prescription or over-the-counter medicines, or dietary supplements to make sure that there are no interactions.
- There are known interactions of mercaptopurine with blood thinning medicine such as warfarin. Ask your doctor what precautions you should take.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your doctor or nurse if you have any of these symptoms and/or any new or unusual symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher
- Chills
- Tiredness that interferes with your daily activities
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Easy bleeding or bruising
- Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking and/or is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Throwing up more than 3 times a day
- Lasting loss of appetite or rapid weight loss of five pounds in a week
- Diarrhea, 4 times in one day or diarrhea with lack of strength or a feeling of being dizzy
- New rash and/or itching that is not relieved by prescribed medicines

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- Develop sensitivity to sunlight/light
- Signs of hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis: fever, chills, swollen lymph nodes, yellowing of the eyes or skin, nausea, vomiting (throwing up), headache, confusion, trouble breathing, and/or rash
- Signs of infection: fever or chills, cough, trouble breathing, severe pain in your abdomen, difficulty urinating, burning or pain when you pass urine, redness and/or swelling of the skin
- Signs of possible liver problems: dark urine, pale bowel movements, pain in your abdomen, feeling very tired and weak, unusual itching, or yellowing of the eyes or skin
- If you think you may be pregnant or may have impregnated your partner

Reproduction Warnings

- **Pregnancy warning**: This medicine can have harmful effects on the unborn baby. Women of child-bearing potential should use effective methods of birth control during your cancer treatment and for 6 months after stopping treatment. Men with female partners of childbearing potential should use effective methods of birth control during your cancer treatment and for 3 months after stopping treatment. Let your doctor know right away if you think you may be pregnant or may have impregnated your partner.
- **Breastfeeding warning**: It is not known if this medicine passes into breast milk. For this reason, women should not breastfeed during treatment and for 1 week after stopping treatment because this medicine could enter the breast milk and cause harm to a breastfeeding baby.
- **Fertility Warning:** In men and women both, this medicine may affect your ability to have children in the future. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you plan to have children. Ask for information on sperm or egg banking.

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