



The Leeds  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Trust

# Mercaptopurine

## For treatment in liver disease

Information for  
patients



This leaflet contains information about mercaptopurine to treat autoimmune hepatitis (AIH). This leaflet will give you more information about this medication.

If you need to get in touch with a member of the team, please use the contact details below:

Liver Secretaries:

Tel: **0113 2064856**

Specialist Nurse:

Tel: **0113 2069275**

Email: **leedsth-tr.hepatologypatientadvice@nhs.net**

Liver Pharmacy Team:

Tel: **0113 2066826**

Email: **leedsth-tr.mmpsliverteam@nhs.net**

### Dose of mercaptopurine

Date commenced	Dose

## Blood test monitoring

Blood tests are required regularly on mercaptopurine. Initially, this is every 2 weeks for the first 2 months and then monthly, for 4 months. Once you are on a stable dose, you will need this every 3 months. These will be arranged through the specialist nurses.

You can use the box below to record the dates you need to attend for bloods.

	Date
<i>Week 0</i>	
<i>Week 2</i>	
<i>Week 4</i>	
<i>Week 6</i>	
<i>Week 8</i>	
<i>Month 1</i>	
<i>Month 2</i>	
<i>Month 3</i>	
<i>Month 4</i>	

In addition to mercaptopurine, you should continue your dose of prednisolone.

This leaflet contains information about mercaptopurine to treat autoimmune liver disease.

### It tells you:

- how the medicine works;
- how you should take it; and
- whether there are any side-effects.

### Why have I been given this leaflet?

The leaflet will help you to remember what your doctor has told you about this medicine. It will also help you to decide whether you want to go ahead with the treatment.

For most medicines, information is provided by the manufacturer in the medicine package. In the UK, this medicine does not have a licence for use in autoimmune liver disease so the leaflet in the medicine package doesn't tell you everything you need to know. We have written this leaflet to give you some extra information.

### What is mercaptopurine and how does it work?

Your blood contains both white and red blood cells. The white cells in the blood form part of the immune system and these can cause damage to the liver. Mercaptopurine helps to reduce the effectiveness of the white blood cells and is used to try to reduce the inflammation and scarring they cause in the liver tissue.

**Mercaptopurine does not work immediately and it can take weeks or a few months before any benefits are noticed.**

## How should I take mercaptopurine?

Mercaptopurine is usually taken as a tablet once per day and your doctor may increase this as necessary. The dose you are given will depend on your body weight.

Depending upon how well the tablets work for you, the dose and number of tablets that you need to take may change.

The tablets should be swallowed with a glass of water, with or after food. Take at the same time each day in relation to food. Mercaptopurine should not be taken with milk or dairy products (should ideally be taken at least 1 hour before or 2 hours after milk or dairy products).

Take care to handle the tablets as little as possible and wash your hands after handling them.

If you miss a dose, you should not 'double up'. Take the next dose at the normal time and completely omit the missed dose.

If you miss several doses, then contact your doctor or specialist nurse for advice on what to do next. If you can't contact them straightaway; for example, if it is a weekend or you are on holiday, then let them know when you can.

## When should mercaptopurine not be used?

**Please tell your doctor if you have any of the conditions listed above or in the manufacturer's leaflet.**

## Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

Talk to your doctor if you are pregnant, plan to get pregnant or think you are pregnant to ensure Mercaptopurine is still appropriate.

Mercaptopurine is one of the safer options in pregnancy; therefore, please do not stop taking Mercaptopurine if you discover you are pregnant without discussing with the team.

**Mercaptopurine can also be found in breast milk. If you are breastfeeding or planning to breastfeed, talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking Mercaptopurine.**

## Do I need any special checks while on mercaptopurine?

Mercaptopurine reduces the production of blood cells which can put you at risk of infections and can sometimes affect the liver. Blood tests will show if you are developing any side-effects. If you are being affected, your treatment will be changed or stopped immediately.

It is important that you do not miss your blood tests. You must not take mercaptopurine unless you are having regular blood tests.

## Are there any side-effects?

Most medicines cause side-effects. The manufacturer's leaflet contains a list of the known side-effects for this medicine.

Everyone reacts differently to medicines. You may have some side-effects or none at all. If you have any of these side-effects, you do not need to contact the team unless they persist or are severe; however, there are some rare but serious side-effects that you would need to tell your doctor about immediately.

In some patients, mercaptopurine can cause a feeling of sickness, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, hair loss and skin rashes. Taking mercaptopurine can affect the blood count (one of the effects is that fewer blood cells are made). Your regular blood count test will check how well your bone marrow is working. Possible indicators of bone marrow damage are anaemia, regularly catching infections, and bruising and bleeding easily.

Very occasionally, mercaptopurine causes liver disease. Your regular blood test will check how well your liver is working and detect any early signs of damage. Possible indicators of liver disease are yellowing of the skin or generalised itching.

There is a slightly increased risk of certain types of cancer such as skin cancer and your doctor should explain this risk before starting treatment. Some people may become sensitive to sunlight (called photosensitivity), which may cause skin discolouration or a rash. Take care to avoid too much sun, cover-up and use a sunscreen with a high protection factor to reduce the risk of skin cancer and photosensitivity.



## Things to tell your doctor immediately

### If you have any of the following, tell your doctor immediately.

- Infections including fever, chills or a sore throat.
- Yellowing of the skin or generalised itching.
- Bleeding gums, black tarry stools, or unexpected bleeding or bruising.
- Severe and continuing diarrhoea, vomiting or stomach pains.

See your doctor if you develop any new symptoms after starting mercaptopurine.

## Will mercaptopurine affect any other medicines?

A full list of medicines that can interfere with mercaptopurine can be found in the manufacturer's patient information leaflet found in your box of medicines. If you take any of the following medications, tell your doctor or pharmacist and they will advise you.

Tell your doctor or pharmacist about all the other medicines you take. This includes any medicines you have had prescribed by another doctor as well as medicines bought from a pharmacy or supermarket and any herbal remedies.

Whenever you are prescribed a new medicine or want to buy a medicine e.g. from a pharmacy or supermarket, it is important that you tell the doctor or pharmacist about all the medicines that you take, including mercaptopurine. You should also tell your dentist when you see him / her.

## **Will mercaptopurine affect any vaccinations?**

Live vaccinations should be avoided in patients taking mercaptopurine and certain non-live vaccinations may be less effective. The pneumonia vaccine, flu vaccine are safe and COVID vaccines are all safe and recommended in immunosuppressed patients.

## **Can I drink alcohol while I am taking mercaptopurine**

Yes, it is safe to drink alcohol while you are taking mercaptopurine; however, large quantities of alcohol should be avoided. It is recommended that you do not exceed the national guidelines.

## **Where should I store mercaptopurine at home?**

Store mercaptopurine in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight.

**It is important that all medicines are stored out of reach of children.**

## **Where do I get my next supply?**

When you are on a steady dose of mercaptopurine, your GP should take over prescribing it. Until then, this will be supplied when you come to the clinic or via your nurse specialist. You must make sure you get any repeat prescriptions to the pharmacy in good time. The pharmacy may not have the medicine in stock and may need a few days to arrange a supply.

## How can I find out more?

Your agreement should be obtained before prescribing any medicine.

This leaflet has been written to provide general information about mercaptopurine. If you have any further questions or concerns, please get in touch with the team using the contact details in this leaflet.



## What did you think of your care?

Scan the QR code or visit [bit.ly/nhsleedsfft](https://bit.ly/nhsleedsfft)

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LN005169  
Publication date  
04/2023  
Review date  
04/2026