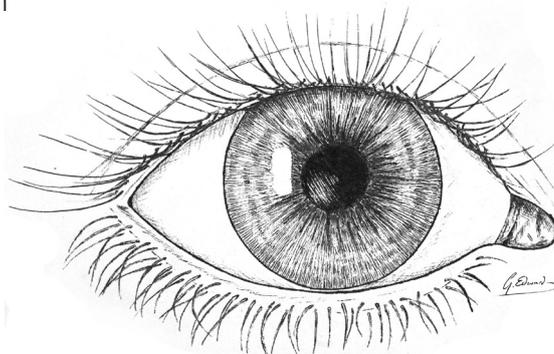


# Azathioprine

Ophthalmology Drug Information



This information leaflet is for patients who have been informed they require immunosuppression treatment for their eye condition.

## Introduction

Azathioprine is a drug that can help prevent your condition causing damage to your eyes. You can discuss the benefits and risks of taking Azathioprine with your healthcare professional before you start treatment, so you are able to make an informed consent.

## What is it?

Azathioprine is a type of drug which belongs to a group of medicines called “immunosuppressants”. Azathioprine is used for diseases that are called autoimmune diseases. In these diseases the body’s own immune system (defence system) attacks the body’s normal tissue. Azathioprine reduces the disease activity, and therefore symptoms, by reducing the activity of the body’s immune system (the body’s own defence system) so it is always used with care.

**The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.**

- **Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available**
- **If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111**
- **Keep the environment clean and tidy**
- **Let’s work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.**

## Why is Azathioprine prescribed?

Your doctor has prescribed Azathioprine for the treatment of your ocular (eye) condition. It is given to reduce the activity of your disease and can also be used to prevent inflammation within the eye. Doctors may prescribe it for people on steroid treatment so that their steroid dose can be reduced.

## How and when you should take your medicine?

Azathioprine is usually taken in tablet form once or twice a day and your doctor will advise you about the correct dose. The tablets should be swallowed whole with a glass of water with or after food. (Do not crush or chew). Some manufacturers also advise that Azathioprine should be taken 1 hour before or 2 hours after milk or dairy products depending on the film coating. Always read the label provided by your pharmacy for any additional instructions.

Azathioprine does not work immediately, your condition may take several weeks to improve before you notice any benefit. In order to have an effect, it should be taken regularly as prescribed by your doctor.

## What are the possible side effects?

Like all medicines, Azathioprine tablets can cause side effects, although not everybody gets them. Normally this treatment is tolerated well.

The most common side effects you may experience are:

- Nausea, vomiting (feeling sick), which is often relieved by taking them after food.
- Diarrhoea.
- Skin rashes.
- Loss of appetite or hair loss.
- Jaundice (eyes or skin turning yellow).
- Unexplained bruising or bleeding.

## Further Information Regarding Side-Effects

This leaflet outlines essential information that you need if you have been prescribed this medicine. Not all possible side effects have been listed above.

We recommend that you read the package insert leaflet from the manufacturer that is supplied with your medicine for a full list of side effects (uncommon, serious and rare), drug interactions reported for this medicine.

It is important to tell your doctor if you think you may have an increased risk of side effects or if they become troublesome or if you notice anything unusual. See your doctor immediately if any side effects and symptoms listed get worse.

You should not stop taking Azathioprine unless the doctor tells you because stopping your medicine can make your condition worse.

# Things to know before you take Azathioprine

Before prescribing Azathioprine, your doctor will order a blood test for an enzyme called Thiopurine Methyl Transferase, also known as TPMP.

TPMP helps to breakdown Azathioprine and remove it from the body. Low levels of TPMT may mean there is a slightly increased risk of side effects with Azathioprine, so the doctor may suggest either a lower dose or may decide Azathioprine is not the right drug for you and discuss other options.

## What should I look out for?

Very occasionally Azathioprine can affect the liver, or the number of blood cells produced by the bone marrow. Your body's resistance to infection can be reduced while you are taking Azathioprine, this can make you more likely to develop infections, which may be more severe than normal. It is important to tell your doctor immediately if you have a:

- A sore throat
- A fever
- Any other symptoms of infection
- Tummy Pain
- Flu-like symptoms
- Any new symptom that concerns you.
- Unexpected bruising or bleeding

If you have never had chickenpox, you should avoid close contact with people who have chickenpox or shingles. If you do come into contact with people suffering from chickenpox or shingles, see your doctor urgently. You may need antiviral treatment which your doctor will be able to prescribe.

## What are the risks?

There is a slight risk of certain type of cancer in people using Azathioprine. Because of the small increase in the risk of lymphoid tissue and skin cancer, you should avoid exposure to sunlight and UV light. Wear protective clothing as well as using a sunscreen with a high protection factor.

Please discuss with your Doctor or Nurse Specialist if you are worried.

## What monitoring will I need?

Azathioprine can affect the blood count, and can sometimes cause liver or kidney problems, your doctor or nurse specialist will arrange for you to have a blood test before you start treatment and have regular blood checks while you are on Azathioprine. It is very important that you have these tests performed as your treatment may be stopped unless you have regular blood tests.

Your Doctor or Nurse Specialist will check your general condition from time to time, which may include your weight, blood pressure, blood sugar levels and urine.

## Can I take other medicines with Azathioprine?

Due to the potential risks of drug interactions with other medications, you should discuss all your current medicines you take with your Doctor before starting Azathioprine. You should always tell any other Doctor treating you that you are on Azathioprine.

Azathioprine is not a painkiller. If you already use painkillers, you may carry on taking these as well as your Azathioprine unless advised by your doctor.

You should not take any other medicines without first checking with your doctor or pharmacist. This includes "over-the-counter medicines", complimentary therapies and home remedies.

## Will it affect immunisation?

If you are on Azathioprine it is recommended that you should NOT have live vaccines. If you require vaccinations it is important to always check with your GP.

Yearly flu vaccines are safe and recommended. But you should consult your GP before having any vaccinations.

## Can I drink alcohol or smoke while on Azathioprine?

Since both Azathioprine and alcohol can affect your liver, you should just drink small amounts of alcohol or avoid it. It is also advisable to stop or reduce smoking. It is best to discuss with your healthcare professional.

## How can I reduce the risk of infection?

You should avoid close contact with people who have recently been in hospital or people who have viral infections. Do not eat soft cheese from unpasteurised milk. Cook-chill foods should be reheated thoroughly, and salads washed well.

Visit the Food Standards Agency website

[www.food.gov.uk/safereheating](http://www.food.gov.uk/safereheating) for information on reducing your risk of infection from foods.

## Does Azathioprine affect fertility or pregnancy?

You must not take Azathioprine during pregnancy unless clearly advised by your doctor, as there is a risk to the foetus. You should use contraception before taking, whilst taking and for up to 3 months after you have stopped taking Azathioprine (oral contraception may not be sufficient).

Men are advised not to father a child during and for up to 6 months after discontinuation of treatment. Please inform your doctor straight away if you are pregnant, or plan to start a family in the near future.

## Does it affect breastfeeding?

You should not breastfeed if you are on Azathioprine. The drug may pass into the breast milk and could be harmful to your baby.

## What if you forget to take your tablets?

Do not take a double dose to make up for the forgotten tablet but wait and take the next dose at the usual time. If you have missed more than one dose, contact your Doctor or Pharmacist for advice.

## General Information about your medicines

- Medicine is an important part of your treatment.
- Each medicine has been individually prescribed for you and it is important that you take your medicine as you have been asked.
- To avoid any problems, please do not stop or change any medicine without telling your doctor first.
- If you feel that any problems you are having are possibly caused by your medicines, inform your doctor or pharmacist as soon as possible.
- Remember to contact your doctor before your prescription has run out to obtain further supplies.
- Please return any unused medicines that are no longer needed to a pharmacy for safe disposal.
- If you have any questions about your medicines please do not hesitate to contact your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

## Additional Information

If you have any further questions or need advice about your treatment do not hesitate to consult your GP or your Eye doctor or Nurse Specialist at the Eye Department at New Cross Hospital.

## Other useful contacts

### **Eye Referral Unit**

01902 695805

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

Weekends, 8am-3pm

### **Minor Procedures**

01902 695831

Monday-Friday, 8.30am-5pm

Outside of these hours, please attend the main Emergency Department or contact NHS Direct on telephone number 111.

Further Information on this subject, please check the following websites:

- [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk)
- [www.patient.co.uk/medicine](http://www.patient.co.uk/medicine)
- [www.medicines.org.uk/emc/browse-medicines](http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/browse-medicines)

## English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

## Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

## Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

## Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

## Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

## Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。