

Azathioprine Factsheet

TREATMENT WITH AZATHIOPRINE

Azathioprine is an immunosuppressant drug. This means that it reduces the activity of your immune or defence system. If you have vasculitis and your immune system is attacking parts of your own body, azathioprine may be prescribed to you to help control your symptoms.

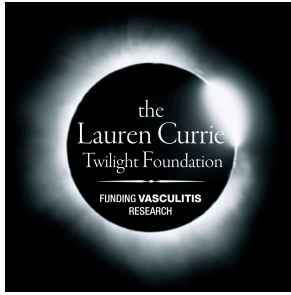
Azathioprine is frequently used to treat various forms of vasculitis and plays a particularly important role in preventing the disease from worsening..

Azathioprine is usually given in tablet form. The daily dose will depend on how much you weigh and the results of blood tests. The usual dose range is 50-250mg a day. You may be given a low dose to start with which will be increased to a maintenance dose as you get used to the medication. It is usually given once or twice a day, with or just after food. You may not notice any benefit for 6-12 weeks. You may have to take azathioprine for many months or even years.

Because azathioprine can affect the number of blood cells your bone marrow produces you will need to have blood tests to monitor your blood count. This needs to be done regularly especially when the treatment is first prescribed. . You will also need blood tests to check your liver and kidneys from time to time.

Many people do not have any problems with azathioprine . However, side effects you need to be aware of include:

- Nausea and vomiting – these can usually be controlled with anti-sickness medicine.
- Feeling generally unwell.
- Mouth ulcers.
- Loss of appetite.
- Dizziness.
- Diarrhoea.
- Flu-like symptoms (fever, aches and pains).
- A skin rash.
- Jaundice.
- Hair loss.



Azathioprine Factsheet

Because your immune system is suppressed you will be more likely to get infections, so you should contact a doctor if you get a sore throat, fever or other symptoms that suggest an infection. You should seek medical advice quickly if you get jaundice (yellowing of the skin, itchy skin or yellowing of the eyes), unexplained bruising or bleeding, or severe side effects of any kind. You should also contact a doctor immediately if you have not had chickenpox or shingles and come into contact with either of these conditions whilst taking azathioprine.

You should not normally take azathioprine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. You should avoid 'live vaccines' such as oral polio, BCG and rubella, but you should make sure you keep your flu and pneumonia vaccines up to date.

Patient Support:

<http://www.thelaurencurrietwilightfoundation.org>

Medical Author: Dr Laurence Knott

August 2014

Peer Reviewed: Dr Neil Basu & Dr David Kluth