



Azathioprine Medication Information

What is azathioprine?

Azathioprine is in the class of drugs known as immunosuppressants. It is in the specific class of immunosuppressants known as antiproliferatives. This drug is used to suppress your immune system so your body does not reject your transplanted organ. This drug works in a similar way to mycophenolate and sirolimus. If you can not tolerate either of these agents you may be started on azathioprine.



Imuran® 50 mg tablets

Are there other names for azathioprine?

Yes, azathioprine may be referred to by its brand name which is Imuran® or by its shorter abbreviated name Aza.

Is azathioprine available in a generic formulation or any other formulation that I should be aware of?

Yes, there are multiple generic formulations of Imuran® available. It is unlikely that you will ever be prescribed brand name Imuran®.



Azathioprine (generic) 50 mg tablets

How do I take azathioprine?

Follow your physician's instructions carefully. Azathioprine should be taken at the same time each day to maintain a steady blood level. It may be taken once or twice a day depending on your dose. It may be taken on an empty stomach or with food to reduce stomach irritation. The most important thing to remember is to take it the same way everyday, either with or without food as the food can affect the drugs absorption. The tablets should be swallowed whole and not crushed or chewed.

What do I do if I missed a dose or I have a late clinic appointment?

If you take your dose twice a day and your next dose is due within 6 hours don't take the missed dose, if you take it once a day and your next dose is due within 12 hours don't take the missed dose.

Does azathioprine interact with any foods or beverages?

No it does not. However you will likely also be taking tacrolimus, cyclosporine or sirolimus and you have to avoid the food and beverages that interact with those medications.

Does azathioprine interact with other drugs?

Drug interactions can occur when one drug affects the levels of another drug, it can cause the levels to either go up or down. Always check with your transplant team before starting any new medications. Interactions with azathioprine may occur with the following:

- ▶ *Allopurinol*

If you have gout and are started on allopurinol it is important to note that there should be a significant decrease in your dose of azathioprine

Please direct your medication questions to
your transplant coordinator or transplant pharmacist.

▸ *Ace-inhibitors (lisinopril, etc)*

You doctors will monitor your blood counts closely when these two drugs are used together

What if I become pregnant, or are considering pregnancy or breast-feeding?

Some drugs are avoided during pregnancy due to the potential harm they may have on the unborn baby. The FDA has a grading system that lets you know how safe a drug is for your unborn child. It ranks drugs from A, where medical studies show no evidence for danger to the fetus or mother, to B, C, D and X, where the medical evidence indicates that the risk to the fetus outweighs any benefit to the mother. Azathioprine is ranked C. Always consult your physician before taking any drug during or when planning pregnancy as your immunosuppression regimen may have to be changed during this time.

Are there other precautions that I need to be concerned about while taking azathioprine?

When you take medications that suppress your immune system you are at an increased risk of infection, report promptly to your physician any indication of infection such as fever, sore throat, swollen glands, sores or lumps in the skin, abnormal bleeding or bruising. Avoid friends and family member that are sick, ask them to wear a mask in your presence. Avoid live vaccines while taking this drug and avoid contact with individuals who have recently taken oral poliovirus vaccine. Also inform your physician if you have had a recent infection, especially chicken pox or shingles. Long term use of immunosuppressive medications may place you at a higher risk of developing certain types of cancers such as skin cancer, cervical cancer and lymphoma (lymph node cancer).

How long will I have to take azathioprine?

You will likely be on this immunosuppressant or one similar to it for as long as you transplant is functioning. There may be some changes to the types of immunosuppressants you will take over time. Make sure your transplant team is aware of any changes made to this medication.

What kind of side effects could I have while taking azathioprine?

Side effects can occur with any drug, even over-the-counter medications. Some of these side effects are mild where as other can be more severe. Minor reactions may resolve on their own but if they persist, contact your physician. For major reactions, you should contact your physician immediately.

For azathioprine, the following are the observed side effects:

Minor:

- headache
- rash
- acne

Major:

- fever
- sore throat
- nausea/vomiting
- diarrhea
- low white blood count
- low platelet count
- anemia

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