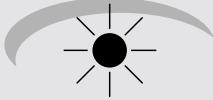
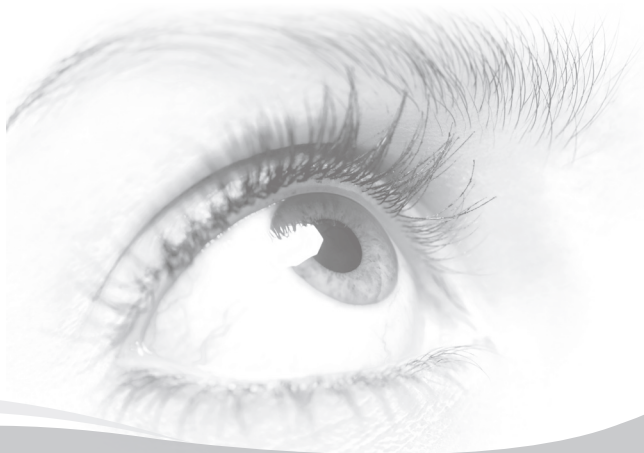


Scottish Uveitis Network



Information about ...

Azathioprine



Ophthalmology Service

Scottish Uveitis National Managed Clinical Network

What is azathioprine?

Azathioprine is a drug used in the treatment of inflammatory conditions and to prevent rejection of organs including heart, kidney and liver, following transplantation. It reduces inflammation in these conditions. Clinical studies have shown that azathioprine can also control inflammation within the eye.

When should you be careful taking azathioprine?

Be sure to tell your doctor if:

- You have any unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- You have episodes of infection.
- You have a sore throat or fever.
- If you come into contact with someone who has chicken pox or shingles, you should contact your GP or the ophthalmology department for advice.
- You are on any other medication.

Can I have vaccinations while I am on azathioprine?

- You should **not** take live vaccines while on azathioprine.
- Pneumovax and an annual flu vaccine **are** recommended while on this treatment.
- Please arrange to see your general practitioner each year to discuss this.

How should azathioprine be taken?

- It is generally taken once or twice a day.
- Taking tablets with food can reduce side effects of nausea and stomach pains.
- Always take the tablets as your Doctor directs.
- Swallow tablets whole, do not suck or chew them.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you realise. However, if you do not realise until the next day, skip the missed dose and carry on as before.
Do not take double the dose.
- If you take too many tablets or someone else accidentally takes your medicine, contact your doctor, pharmacist or the nearest hospital straight away.

Will I need blood tests?

- You will require blood tests weekly for a month, then at least every three months thereafter.

What are the possible side effects?

- Diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting can occur, but generally improve with continued use or reduced dose. Nausea is often relieved by taking them with food
- Azathioprine can affect your bone marrow causing a reduction in white cells, which normally prevent infection, or platelets which stop bleeding and reduce bruising. Your blood is monitored regularly to identify any problems early.
- Less commonly, impaired liver function and jaundice may occur.

- There may be an increased risk of infection with this treatment. It is important to inform your doctor if you feel unwell.
- There is an increased risk of skin cancer with azathioprine. Therefore you should limit your exposure to sunlight by wearing appropriate protective clothing and using a sunscreen with a high protection factor.
- Lymphoma (cancer of the lymphoid tissues) has been reported but is very rare.
- Generally this treatment is tolerated well.
- Should you develop any side effects, please contact your GP or ophthalmologist for advice.

Can azathioprine be used when pregnant or breast feeding?

- You should avoid azathioprine if you are or think you may be pregnant, unless advised to continue by your doctor as it could harm an unborn baby.
- Reliable contraception should be used when taking azathioprine.
- Azathioprine should generally be stopped at least 6 weeks before trying for a baby.
- Azathioprine is felt to be relatively safe when breast feeding. However it may pass into breast milk and should be discussed with your doctor.

How long will azathioprine take to work?

- Azathioprine does not work immediately. It may take up to 3 months before you notice any benefit.

May I drink alcohol while taking azathioprine?

- As azathioprine can affect your liver, alcohol consumption should be restricted.

If you experience problems, contact your GP or your local ophthalmology department:

Contact number: _____

Further information

The Scottish Uveitis National Managed Clinical Network is a nationally supported network to improve and ensure an equality of care for patients with uveitis throughout Scotland.

www.sun.scot.nhs.uk

The Uveitis Information Group (Scotland) is a patient-led charity, based in Scotland, run by volunteers. They provide information, leaflets and fact sheets on uveitis which can be accessed via their site.

Uveitis Information Group

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Email: info@uveitis.net
Website: **www.uveitis.net**

This leaflet has been produced by the Scottish Uveitis National Managed Clinical Network.

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Available on-line at: **www.sun.scot.nhs.uk**

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