



Oral mercaptopurine for children and young people

An information guide for patients, parents and carers

The purpose of this guide is to give information on the use of mercaptopurine in children and young people with cancer.

Please read this guide carefully alongside any patient information provided by the manufacturer. We have written this guide to give you more information about the use of this medicine in children and young people. Keep it somewhere safe so you can read it again.

What is mercaptopurine?

Mercaptopurine is a chemotherapy medicine commonly used in the treatment of certain types of cancer and leukaemia.

What preparations of mercaptopurine are available?

Mercaptopurine is available as 10mg and 50mg tablets. A liquid is available which contains mercaptopurine 100mg/5ml.

Where can I get mercaptopurine from?

Mercaptopurine must only be obtained from the hospital at which you/your child is being treated. Please remember to bring all medication with you at each hospital visit.

How is mercaptopurine given?

Mercaptopurine can be taken with water, diluted juice or may be taken with food, milk/dairy products or on an empty stomach, but it should always be taken in the same way. It should be taken at the same time each day,

in the evening (advice from the manufacturer may differ from this).

If you/your child is having nasogastric feeds (NG feeds), then the administration of mercaptopurine can be timed around their feeds. Your hospital team will be able to advise you on this.

The tablets should be swallowed whole with plenty of water or juice. Do not break, crush or chew the tablets. Liquid medicine should be measured in an oral syringe through a bung/stopper in the neck of the bottle (supplied by pharmacy). Your hospital team will explain how to measure liquid medicine using a syringe and how to dispose of the syringe after use.

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Are there any possible side effects?

It is important to remember that everyone reacts differently to chemotherapy. Some will have very few side effects whilst others will have more. The side effects listed below will not affect everyone who is given mercaptopurine and may be different if more than one chemotherapy drug is given.

What are the common side effects?

Reduced bone marrow function

Blood counts will be checked regularly to see how the bone marrow is working. A low neutrophil count can make you/your child more at risk of infection. A low haemoglobin count indicates anaemia which may make you/your child unusually tired and a low platelet count may cause bruising or bleeding.

Please contact your hospital team if there are signs of any infection, especially a high temperature or signs of unusual tiredness, bruising or bleeding.

What are the less common side effects?

Diarrhoea

This is usually mild. If diarrhoea is severe or continuous, contact your team for advice.

Skin rashes

Mercaptopurine can cause a rash which may be itchy. If this happens contact your team for advice.

Nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick)

If this occurs it is usually mild. Anti-sickness medicines can be given up to one hour before the mercaptopurine to reduce or prevent these symptoms. Please contact your team if sickness is not controlled.

Temporary effect on liver function

Mercaptopurine can cause some changes to liver function. This should return to normal when the treatment is finished. Blood tests may be taken to monitor liver function (called LFTs – liver function tests). If there is pain on the right side of the abdomen, yellowing of the skin and eyes, or signs of bruising or bleeding, contact your team for advice.

Mouth ulcers

If your/your child's mouth becomes sore or small ulcers develop, contact your team for advice. Always follow the advice from your hospital on how to take good care of your/your child's mouth before and during treatment.

Is there anything else I should know about or do?

Contact the hospital at which you/your child is being treated if:

- a dose of mercaptopurine is forgotten
- vomiting occurs after taking the dose
- too much mercaptopurine is given

Which tests/investigations may take place before, during or after treatment with mercaptopurine?

Full blood count

A full blood count will be done regularly at your hospital or by your community team. The dose of mercaptopurine may need to be adjusted according to the result. The new dose will be recorded on the label or on the patient dosing information chart. Alternatively, you may be telephoned with the new dose.

Does mercaptopurine interact with any other medicines?

Some medicines can affect how well mercaptopurine works. Always tell the prescriber about any other medication that is being taken. Make sure and check with the doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medicines. This includes supplements, herbal and complementary medicines.

How should the medicine be handled and stored?

- keep out of reach and sight of children
- store the tablets and liquid at room temperature
- keep out of direct sunlight
- mercaptopurine liquid has a short expiry once opened so make sure you write the date opened on the bottle.
- always handle these medicines with care – handle as little as possible and always wear gloves.
- if you are pregnant or think you could be pregnant, please discuss handling instructions with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist

Any mercaptopurine that has not been given, or is out of date, must be returned to the hospital at which you/your child is being treated. **Do not throw away at home.**

Please read the CCLG factsheet – safe handling of chemotherapy medicines

Pregnancy

If you are sexually active while taking anti-cancer medicines or drugs, it is important that you use contraception such as condoms, the pill or coil to avoid pregnancy. You may need to take a pregnancy test to confirm you are not pregnant before taking this medicine. Contraception should continue for a while after treatment finishes. Your team will advise how long you should continue contraception for.

Fertility

Depending on the type, dose and combination of medicines given during your treatment, it is possible that fertility may be affected. For girls, this means that it may be harder for them to become pregnant in the future. For boys, this may mean that their sperm is less fertile which can affect their chance of having children in the future. If you would like more information about this please discuss with your medical team.

If you have any questions about mercaptopurine, please contact the hospital at which you/your child is being treated. This guide only gives general information.

Always discuss individual treatment with your/your child's medical team. Do not rely on this guide alone for information about treatment.



USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG)

publishes a variety of free resources to order or download
www.cclg.org.uk

Young Lives vs Cancer offers practical support to children and young people with cancer and to their families
www.younglivesvscancer.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support offers support and advice to those affected by cancer.
www.macmillan.org.uk

EMC (Electronic Medicines Compendium) offers up to date, approved and regulated information for licensed medicines.
www.medicines.org.uk



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Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG) is a leading national charity and expert voice for all childhood cancers.

Each week in the UK and Ireland, more than 30 children are diagnosed with cancer. Our network of dedicated professional members work together in treatment, care and research to help shape a future where all children with cancer survive and live happy, healthy and independent lives.

We fund and support innovative world-class research and collaborate, both nationally and internationally, to drive forward improvements in childhood cancer. Our award-winning information resources help lessen the anxiety, stress and loneliness commonly felt by families, giving support throughout the cancer journey.

Our work is funded by donations. If you would like to help, text 'CCLG' to 70085 to donate £3. You may be charged for one text message at your network's standard or charity rate. CCLG (registered charity numbers 1182637 and SC049948) will receive 100% of your donation.

We are grateful to all those who have contributed to this publication. We make every effort to ensure that this information is accurate and up to date at the time of printing. CCLG does not accept any responsibility for information provided by third parties including those referred to or signposted to in this publication. Information in this publication should be used to supplement appropriate professional or other advice specific to your circumstances.

If you have any comments on this factsheet, please contact us at publications@cclg.org.uk. CCLG publications on a variety of topics related to children's cancer are available to order or download free of charge from our website.