



# NEBRASKA CANCER SPECIALISTS

*the Physicians of Oncology Hematology West*

## **Methotrexate**

**Drug type:** Methotrexate is an anti-cancer/cytotoxic chemotherapy drug.

### **How Methotrexate is given:**

- Methotrexate is given through an infusion into a vein (intravenous, IV).

### **Side effects of Methotrexate:**

Important things to remember about the side effects of methotrexate:

- Most people do not experience all of the side effects listed.
- Side effects are almost always reversible and will usually go away after treatment is complete.
- There are many options to help minimize or prevent side effects.
- In some cases leucovorin infusion may be given 24 hours after methotrexate to lessen the side effects of methotrexate.

### **The following side effects are common for patients receiving methotrexate:**

- Low blood counts. Your white and red blood cells and platelets may temporarily decrease. This can put you at increased risk for infection, anemia and/or bleeding.
- Mouth sores. (usually occur 3-7 days after treatment)
- Nausea and vomiting. (uncommon with low dose)
- Poor appetite

### **These are less common side effects of patients receiving methotrexate:**

- Kidney toxicity particularly with high-doses. In severe cases can lead to kidney failure. Care is taken to make sure patient is well hydrated with IV fluids before infusion of high-dose methotrexate.
- Skin rash, reddening of the skin
- Diarrhea
- Hair loss
- Eye irritation
- Increases in blood tests measuring liver function, often seen with high dose treatment. These return to normal within about 10 days.
- Darkening of the skin where previous radiation treatment has been given.

**Side effects specific to intrathecal administration of methotrexate (the drug is infused directly into the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) the fluid that is surrounding the brain and spinal cord):**

- Inflammation of the membrane surrounding the brain and spinal column. Symptoms are: severe headache, stiff neck, seizures, vomiting, and fever.
- Central neurotoxicity: difficulty with speech, paralysis of the arms and legs, seizures, or coma. This may develop within 6 days of treatment and resolves within 48-72 hours

**When to contact your doctor or health care provider:**

Contact your health care provider ***immediately***, day or night, if you should experience any of the following symptoms:

- Fever of 101° F or higher, chills (possible signs of infection)

The following symptoms require medical attention, but are not an emergency. Contact your health care provider ***within 24 hours*** of noticing any of the following:

- Unusual bleeding or bruising
- Black or tarry stools, or blood in your stools or urine
- Extreme fatigue (unable to carry on self-care activities)
- Mouth sores (painful redness, swelling or ulcers)
- Nausea (interferes with ability to eat and unrelieved with prescribed medication)
- Vomiting (vomiting more than 4-5 times in a 24 hour period)
- Diarrhea (4-6 episodes in a 24-hour period)
- No urine output in a 12 hour period
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Swelling of the feet or ankles. Sudden weight gain.
- Signs of infection such as redness or swelling, pain on swallowing, coughing up mucous, or painful urination.
- Unable to eat or drink for 24 hours or signs of dehydration: tiredness, thirst, dry mouth, dark and decrease amount of urine, or dizziness

**Always inform your health care provider if you experience any unusual symptoms.**