

Azathioprine for Glomerulonephritis

Azathioprine for Glomerulonephritis

What is azathioprine (a-za-THI-o-preen)?

Azathioprine is a type of medication known as an immunosuppressant. This medication works by lowering your body's harmful response to immune system diseases like glomerulonephritis. Azathioprine is used to control your disease.

How do I take azathioprine?

- Azathioprine comes in a tablet (pill) form.
- Take azathioprine as directed by your renal team. It does not matter what time of day you take it.
- This medication can be taken with or without food. Take it with food if it causes nausea (feeling sick to your stomach).

What if I miss a dose?

- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember.
- If it is almost time to take your next dose, skip the missed dose and take the next dose at the regular time.
- **Do not take a double dose of medication.** This could lead to more side effects.

How will I know if the medication is working?

- You will have regular blood tests to check how your body responds while taking this medication. This includes your kidneys, liver, and blood cell count.
- These tests help your health care team know what dose you need. This also helps to lower any side effects you may have.

What are the possible side effects?

- Common side effects of azathioprine include:
 - › Nausea
 - › Diarrhea (loose, watery poop)

If you have any of these side effects, try eating smaller meals more often. If you still have these side effects, talk to your health care team.

- Azathioprine may lower your white blood cells (cells that fight infection), red blood cells (cells that carry oxygen), or platelets (cells that help your blood clot). Your regular blood tests will check for this. **Tell your health care team if you have bruising or bleeding.**
- Azathioprine may increase your risk of getting an infection. Wash your hands often and avoid close contact with anyone who may be sick. **If you are not feeling well** (like a bad sore throat or cough, pain when you pee) **and you have a fever** (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F) **or chills, tell your health care team right away.**
- Your risk of lymphoma (blood cancer), skin cancer, or other types of cancer may be higher.
 - › **Do not** use tanning beds.
 - › Always protect yourself from the sun by wearing sunscreen, protective clothing, and a hat.

Is azathioprine safe during pregnancy and breastfeeding?

- Azathioprine can be used in pregnancy. The risk of harmful effects on a baby from azathioprine is low. The risk is similar to pregnancies without azathioprine use. Low birth weight, prematurity, and jaundice have been reported with azathioprine use in pregnancy.
- It is OK to take azathioprine while breastfeeding (or chestfeeding). Azathioprine can be transferred into breastmilk in small amounts. The risk of harmful effects on the baby is low.
 - › You may need to take a lower dose and/or breastfeed at certain times after taking azathioprine to limit the transfer of medication into your milk supply.
 - › Your baby's health care provider may also check your baby's blood work more often.

Talk to your health care team before breastfeeding/chestfeeding.

How do I store this medication?

- Make sure to store azathioprine in a dry place at room temperature away from sunlight.
- **Do not store azathioprine in the bathroom.**
- Keep out of reach of children and pets.

Drug interactions

- Azathioprine can interact with some drugs (like those taken for gout) and herbal products. This can be dangerous.
- **Do not use allopurinol or febuxostat while taking azathioprine. These medications cannot be used together.**
- **It is important to talk with your pharmacist or health care team before starting any new medications, including over-the-counter medications, supplements, or natural products.**

What else do I need to know?

- Azathioprine can interact with some medications. It is important to talk with your pharmacist or health care team before starting any new medications, including over-the-counter medications, supplements, and natural products.
- Talk to your health care team about timing of vaccines while taking azathioprine. Ask if there are any vaccines you should get to protect you while taking this medication.

What are your questions?

Please ask a member of your health care team. We are here to help you.

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Prepared by: Renal Program
Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services

WQ85-2421 © July 2024 Nova Scotia Health Authority
To be reviewed July 2027 or sooner, if needed.