

THIOPURINES FOR INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE

Thiopurines are a type of medicine used to treat Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. They work by reducing the activity of your immune system to help control inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). There are two thiopurines available in Australia.

Active ingredient	Brand name
azathioprine	Azapin, Imazan, Imuran, Thioprine
6-mercaptopurine (6-MP)	Puri-nethol

Use this action plan when you are starting thiopurines. It can help you understand the benefits and risks and the need for monitoring and checks.

Taking thiopurines

Benefits

- ✓ Fewer flares
- ✓ Better control of your disease
- ✓ Reduced need for steroids
- ✓ Better healing of bowel wall
- ✓ Lower risk of hospitalisation and surgery
- ✓ Improved quality of life

Things to consider

Liver toxicity, cancer and infections

Very low risk

Low risk

Medium risk

High risk

Very high risk



These medicines take time to work. It can take up to 2-3 months before you feel better.



Almost all patients who experience liver toxicity return to normal liver function after decreasing or stopping treatment with thiopurines.



3 out of 10,000 people will get lymphoma each year. With thiopurines, this risk still remains very low, with only 5 out of 10,000 people affected each year.



Thiopurines can be used safely during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Talk to your IBD team before planning pregnancy.

Questions to ask my doctor/IBD team



Further information

- ▶ **Crohn's & Colitis Australia** crohnsandcolitis.com.au
- ▶ **GESA - Inflammatory bowel disease patient factsheet** gesa.org.au
- ▶ **Download the MedicineWise app** to keep track of your medicines and access health information such as blood test results. nps.org.au/medicinewiseapp/

Before starting a thiopurine

Speak to your doctor about these tests and actions, and tick once completed

- Get blood tests** to check your full blood count, liver and kidney function, immunity to certain infections
- Determine your TPMT level** (the enzyme activity in your blood that determines how you process, or metabolise, thiopurines). This helps your doctor decide on a suitable dose for you
- Have vaccinations** (eg, influenza, pneumococcal, HPV, hepatitis B, varicella-zoster, MMR)
- Get a baseline skin check (adults)**



Tips

- ▶ Protect your skin from the sun
- ▶ Try taking your medicine with food or at bedtime if it upsets your stomach
- ▶ Take your medicine in the same way each day
- ▶ Continue taking your medicine even if you feel well

My thiopurine dosage




Date started	Medicine name – Active ingredient	Tablet strength (mg)	Number of tablets	How many times per day
	<input type="checkbox"/> azathioprine			
	<input type="checkbox"/> 6-mercaptopurine (6-MP)			

Regular monitoring and checks

Speak to a doctor about which of these tests and vaccinations you will need once you are taking thiopurines

Test	How often	Next appointment/Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> Blood tests, full blood count, electrolytes, liver function tests	At first every 1–2 weeks depending on your result, then every 3 months or as required	
Vaccinations		
<input type="checkbox"/> Flu	Every year	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pneumonia	Every 5 years	
<input type="checkbox"/> COVID-19	As directed	
Skin check (adults)	Every year	

When to contact my doctor

 Urgently, if I get any of these symptoms	 As soon as possible, if I	 Regularly, when I
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Fever, sore throat, chills (signs of infection or bone marrow suppression) ▶ Unexplained bruising or bleeding ▶ Blood in urine or black stools ▶ Yellowing of skin or eyes, dark urine or pale stools (signs of liver toxicity) ▶ Severe upper abdominal pain, vomiting (symptoms of pancreatitis) <p>Stop taking this medicine until you speak to your doctor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Feel sick and lose my appetite ▶ Have an open sore that isn't healing ▶ Develop an unexplained rash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Have appointments for tests to monitor my IBD and medicines even if well ▶ Am taking or plan to take any other medicines, including over-the-counter, herbal or naturopathic medicines and treatments

+ TARGETED THERAPIES ALLIANCE

Helping consumers and health professionals make safe and wise therapeutic decisions about biological disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (bDMARDs) and other specialised medicines. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health through the Value in Prescribing bDMARDs Program Grant.