



This handout explains azathioprine, a medicine used to reduce inflammation.

Azathioprine

To treat idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis

What is azathioprine?

Azathioprine is a medicine that can be used to treat many different conditions, including *idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis*. This is the scarring of lung tissue that makes the lungs less flexible and unable to move oxygen into the blood. It is often described as “chest tightness.”

We do not know exactly what causes idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, but it is believed that continued inflammation leads to it. Azathioprine works by suppressing the immune system. It decreases the amount of chemicals that cause inflammation that the immune system produces.

Azathioprine is often prescribed with a steroid medicine (such as prednisone) and N-acetylcysteine, a nutritional supplement with *antioxidant* properties. Antioxidants help prevent or slow damage to cells.

Imuran and Azasan are 2 brand names for azathioprine. It also comes in generic form.

How should I take it?

- Azathioprine can be taken as oral tablets or liquid, and as an *intravenous* (IV) injection.
- Most people begin by taking 25 mg to 50 mg once a day.
- Your dose may be adjusted depending on how you respond to it.
- Azathioprine may be taken with or without food.
- It may take several months for you to see a benefit from this medicine.
- If you miss a dose, do not double your next dose to “make up” for the missed dose. Just take your next dose at the regularly scheduled time.

How should I store the medicine?

Store azathioprine in a closed container at room temperature. Keep it out of reach of children.

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Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

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What are the side effects?

Possible side effects of azathioprine are:

- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Liver damage
- Damage to white blood cells and platelets (you will have regular blood tests to monitor for these possible side effects)
- Increased risk of getting an infection

Less common side effects are muscle aches or pains and hair loss. And, long-term use of azathioprine may increase your risk for certain cancers.

Special Instructions

While you are taking azathioprine:

- Do **not** take allopurinol, a medicine that may be used for gout. Allopurinol interferes with the breakdown of azathioprine in the body. If you are taking allopurinol, call your doctor before taking azathioprine.
- Avoid contact with people who have infections, colds, or the flu.
- **Call your doctor right away** if you have any of these signs of infection:
 - Fever of 100.5°F (38°C) or higher
 - Chills
 - Severe sore throat
 - Ear or sinus pain
 - Cough
 - Increased sputum
 - Pain when you urinate
 - Mouth sores
 - A wound that will not heal
- **Call your doctor right away** if you have severe stomach pain, severe nausea or vomiting, loss of appetite, dark urine, yellow skin, yellowing of the whites of your eyes, or extreme tiredness. These symptoms may be signs of liver damage.
- Talk with your doctor if you are pregnant or are planning to become pregnant. Breastfeeding is not advised if you are taking azathioprine.

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