



Mycophenolate

To treat pulmonary fibrosis

This handout explains mycophenolate. This medicine is used to reduce inflammation by making the immune system less active.

What is mycophenolate?

Mycophenolate is an *immunosuppressant* medicine. It makes the immune system less active, which can help prevent the body from attacking itself. The result is less inflammation.

Mycophenolate prevents your body from producing white blood cells (WBCs), which your immune system normally makes when it is fighting off disease. Your WBCs kill and remove bad cells from your body. During this process you may have inflammation, which will lead to *pulmonary fibrosis*. Pulmonary fibrosis is scarring of the lung tissue that makes the lungs less flexible and unable to move oxygen into the blood. It is often described as “chest tightness.”

By making your immune system less active, you may be able to reduce fibrosis. Mycophenolate is often used together with prednisone, a steroid medicine.

How should I take it?

- Mycophenolate tablets come in 2 forms. You will take one of these, but not both:
 - Mycophenolate *mofetil* (CellCept) comes in 250 mg and 500 mg
 - Mycophenolate *sodium* (Myfortic) comes in 180 mg and 360 mg
- Mycophenolate is usually given 2 times a day, once in the morning and once in the evening, on an empty stomach.
- Some substances prevent mycophenolate from getting into your body. Avoid taking these products within at least 2 hours of taking mycophenolate:
 - Antacids that contain aluminum or magnesium
 - Iron supplements
 - A medicine called sevelamer (Renagel)
- 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.

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Special Precautions

- Before you start taking mycophenolate, tell your doctor if you are:
 - Pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding.
 - Taking birth control medicines. These may be less effective while you are taking mycophenolate. Talk with your doctor about adding a second form of birth control.
- Some antibiotics can make mycophenolate less effective. Before you take any antibiotics, ask your doctor or pharmacist if it will affect how mycophenolate works in your body.
- A medicine called probenecid can greatly increase the levels of mycophenolate in the body. Probenecid is used mostly to treat gout. If you are taking it, or if it is prescribed for you while you are taking mycophenolate, talk with your doctor before you use both medicines at the same time.

Caution with Vaccines

Before you start taking mycophenolate, make sure your vaccines are up to date. You may still get vaccinated while taking mycophenolate, but they may not work as well since your immune system is not as active.

Talk with your doctor before getting any **live virus** vaccines. Getting your influenza vaccine (flu shot) every year is still advised.

What are the side effects?

Greater Risk of Infection

When your white blood cell count is low, your immune system is not able to fight off infections as well. This will make you more likely to get viruses (such as cold or flu), and infections from bacteria (such as pneumonia), fungal infections (such as thrush), and protozoa (such as malaria).

Call your doctor if you are sick and:

- You have a high fever.
- Your illness lasts longer than usual.
- Your symptoms are different than they usually are when you are sick.

If you get cold sores, you may have more outbreaks while you are taking mycophenolate. You may also get shingles, a painful outbreak of the skin caused by the *varicella zoster* virus, which also causes chickenpox. You may want to get a *varicella zoster* vaccine to prevent a shingles outbreak.

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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If you get cold sores or shingles, do **not** pop the blisters that develop. Call your doctor to see if you will need medicine to treat these conditions.

Bone Marrow Suppression

Besides affecting your white blood cells, mycophenolate can also affect your red blood cells and *platelets* (blood cells that help your blood clot when you are bleeding). All of these cells are made in your bone marrow, the tissue inside your bones.

If you feel weak or tired, your red blood cell count may be too low. This condition is called *anemia*, where the red blood cells are too few to carry enough oxygen in the body.

If your platelet count is too low, you may bruise more easily, or cuts and scrapes will bleed longer than usual.

Call your doctor right away if you have these symptoms of more serious bleeding:

- Very dark (black) tarry stools
- Urine that is orange, red, brown, or pink
- Vomit that looks like burnt coffee grounds

Gastrointestinal Problems

Mycophenolate can cause stomach or intestinal upset. You may have nausea, with or without vomiting. You may also have diarrhea or constipation.

Call your doctor if you:

- Are nauseous and cannot eat or take your medicines

Have diarrhea that is severe or lasts for several days

Pure Red Cell Aplasia

Rarely, people who take mycophenolate develop *pure red cell aplasia*.

Call your doctor if you have:

- Extreme tiredness
- Very pale skin

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