

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.

Mycophenolate keeps your body from making white blood cells (WBCs). Your immune system normally makes WBCs when it is fighting a disease. WBCs kill and remove bad cells from your body.

But, while the WBCs do their work, you may have inflammation. This can lead to *pulmonary fibrosis*, a scarring of the lung tissue. This scarring makes the lungs less flexible. It makes it harder for them to move oxygen into the blood. People describe this as a feeling of tightness in their chest.

Your provider may prescribe mycophenolate to make your immune system less active and reduce your risk of fibrosis. You may also receive a prescription for 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 taken twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. Take it on an empty stomach.



Take mycophenolate on an empty stomach 2 times a day.

What if I miss a dose?

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.

Does it interact with foods or other medicines?

Some substances stop mycophenolate from getting into your body. Avoid taking these products within at least 2 hours of taking mycophenolate:

- Antacids that contain aluminum or magnesium
- Supplements that contain iron (either *ferrous* or *ferric*)
- A medicine called *sevelamer* (Renagel)

Special Precautions

- Before you start taking mycophenolate, tell your doctor if you are:
 - Breastfeeding, pregnant, or planning to become pregnant.
 - Taking birth control medicines. These may not work as well while you are taking mycophenolate. Talk with your doctor about adding a 2nd form of birth control.
- Mycophenolate may not work as well if you are taking certain antibiotics. Before you take any antibiotics, ask your provider 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 this medicine, or if it is prescribed for you while you are taking mycophenolate, talk with your provider 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 vaccines while taking mycophenolate, but they may not work as well since your immune system is not as active.

Talk with your provider before getting any **live virus** vaccines. We do advise that you get your influenza vaccine (flu shot) every year, even while you are taking mycophenolate.

What are the side effects?

Higher Risk of Infection

When your white blood cell count is low, your immune system is not able to fight 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 provider if you are sick and:

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

Cold Sores

If you sometimes get cold sores, you may have more of them 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.

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

Bone Marrow Suppression

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 your:

- Red blood cell count is too low, you will feel weak or tired. This condition is called *anemia*. It happens when you don't have the red blood cells your body needs for carrying oxygen to your tissues.
- Platelet count is too low, you may bruise more easily. Cuts and scrapes will bleed longer than usual.

If your blood is not clotting well, you will see blood in your stool, urine, or vomit. **Call your provider right away if you have:**

- Very dark (black) tarry stools
- Urine (pee) 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 (loose stool) or constipation (hard stool).

Call your provider if you:

- Have nausea 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* (*erythroblastopenia*). This type of anemia occurs when the bone marrow stops making red blood cells.

Call your provider if you:

- Are very very tired
- Have very pale skin

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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