

## **AZATHIOPRINE (IMURAN)**

Azathioprine is FDA approved drug for adjunctive therapy in prevention of rejection of kidney transplants and in active rheumatoid arthritis. It is a potent immunosuppressant and has been used in many other situations when suppressing the immune system is desired. You are being given Azathioprine for your neurologic problem.

The medicine comes in 50 mg tablets. The usual dose is 150-200 mg a day but the dose can vary depending on your weight and tolerance of the medication.

Start with one 50 mg tablet daily usually in the morning with a meal. After one week, you should have your blood drawn. If the laboratory data allows and you have not had an allergic reaction to the drug (see below), someone from the doctors office will call you with the next step. Do not increase until it is known that this is safe. The next dose will likely be three 50 mg tablets a day (150 mg total). Please have blood drawn seven days later. You may need to increase or decrease the dose after that but this decision will be made by your doctor. The total dose in mg is likely to be just above your weight in pounds. The time between dose changes is about ten days given the laboratory turnaround.

There are several important things to know about this medication.

First, about 10-15% of individuals are allergic to azathioprine. This usually occurs after three or four doses and is manifested by flu-like syndrome with temperatures as high as 104°F. If this happens, stop the medication immediately and call your doctor. It is likely that you are allergic and unable to take azathioprine.

Second, most of the side effects of azathioprine will not be detected by you, but rather detected by close blood monitoring. Thus, it is mandatory that you and your doctor keep in close contact concerning your blood studies. A schedule of laboratory evaluations must be established and followed. The most common problem in this is your local laboratory. Before you start, you should be sure that the laboratory where your blood will be drawn can fax the results to your doctor in a day or two. If the Lab does not believe they can meet those demands, you should look for another laboratory.

After you are on a stable dose, the blood monitoring will be weekly for 4 weeks, then monthly for 3 months and the every 3 months for as long as you are on azathioprine.

**AZATHIOPRINE (By mouth)**  
**Azathioprine (ay-za-THYE-oh-preen)**

**Prevents your body from rejecting a kidney transplant. This medicine also reduces joint pain in severe rheumatoid arthritis.**

**Brand Name(s): Azasan, Imuran**

There may be other brand names for this medicine.

**When This Medicine Should Not Be Used:**

You should not use this medicine if you have had an allergic reaction to azathioprine, or if you are pregnant. You should not use azathioprine if you have received other medicines such as cyclophosphamide (Cytoxan®, Neosar®), chlorambucil (Leukeran®), or melphalan (Alkeran®) to treat your arthritis.

**How to Use This Medicine:**

**Tablet**

- Your doctor will tell you how much of this medicine to use and how often. Your dose may need to be changed several times in order to find out what works best for you. Do not use more medicine or use it more often than your doctor tells you to.

**If a dose is missed:**

- If you miss a dose or forget to use your medicine, use it as soon as you can. If it is almost time for your next dose, wait until then to use the medicine and skip the missed dose. Do not use extra medicine to make up for a missed dose.
- Check with your doctor if you miss more than one dose.

**How to Store and Dispose of This Medicine:**

- Store the medicine in a closed container at room temperature, away from heat, moisture, and direct light.
- Ask your pharmacist, doctor, or health caregiver about the best way to dispose of any leftover medicine after you have finished your treatment. You will also need to throw away old medicine after the expiration date has passed.
- Keep all medicine away from children and never share your medicine with anyone.

**Drugs and Foods to Avoid:**

**Ask your doctor or pharmacist before using any other medicine, including over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal products.**

- Tell your doctor if you are using allopurinol (Aloprim®, Zyloprim®), cotrimoxazole (Bactrim®, Cotrim®, Septra®), mesalamine (Asacol®, Rowasa®), olsalazine (Dipentum®), sulfasalazine (Azulfidine®), or medicines that may weaken the immune system such as steroids (methylprednisolone, prednisone, Medrol®).
- Make sure your doctor knows if you are using a blood thinner such as warfarin (Coumadin®), or blood pressure medicines such as captopril, enalapril, lisinopril, Accupril®, Lotensin®, Lotrel®, Prinivil®, Zestoretic®, Vasotec®, or Zestril®.
- Talk to your doctor before getting flu shots or other vaccines while you are receiving this medicine. Vaccines may not work as well, or they could make you ill while you are using this medicine.

**Warnings While Using This Medicine:**

- Using this medicine while you are pregnant can harm your unborn baby. Use an effective form of birth control to keep from getting pregnant. If you think you have become pregnant while using the medicine, tell your doctor right away.
- Make sure your doctor knows if you are breastfeeding, or if you have liver disease, kidney disease, or any type of infection.
- You should not use this medicine if you are also taking mercaptopurine (Purinethol®). Using these medicines together could cause serious health problems.
- Your doctor will need to check your blood at regular visits while you are using this medicine. Be sure to keep all appointments.
- This medicine lowers the number of some types of blood cells in your body. Because of this, you may get infections more easily. To help with these problems, avoid being near people who are sick or have infections. Wash your hands often.
- This medicine may increase your risk of developing certain types of cancer. Talk with your doctor about how this risk will affect you.

**Possible Side Effects While Using This Medicine:**

**Call your doctor right away if you notice any of these side effects:**

- Allergic reaction: Itching or hives, swelling in your face or hands, swelling or tingling in your mouth or throat, chest tightness, trouble breathing.
- Dark-colored urine.
- Fever, chills, cough, sore throat, and body aches.
- Muscle pain, lightheadedness or fainting.
- Severe stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Unusual bleeding, bruising, or weakness.
- Yellowing of your skin or the whites of your eyes.

**If you notice these less serious side effects, talk with your doctor:**

- Mild skin rash or itching.
- Hair loss.
- Joint pain.
- Sores or white patches on your lips, mouth, or throat.

**If you notice other side effects that you think are caused by this medicine, tell your doctor.**

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