

Mycophenolate mofetil in the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)

GI Unit

Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is about a medication called mycophenolate mofetil for people who have inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). It gives information on how the medication works, how to take it and its benefits and risks.

What is mycophenolate mofetil?

At present, it is used as an anti-rejection drug for organ transplants and it is unlicensed for use in inflammatory bowel disease. However, it has been used successfully in patients with both Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. It is good for patients who are intolerant to certain other drugs in the group of medications called immunosuppressants.

Mycophenolate mofetil (MMF) is available in 500mg tablets, 250mg capsules and 1g/5ml liquid suspension. You may also see it named Cellcept.

It may be recommended to you if you keep getting relapses of your IBD symptoms, particularly if you need to have steroids often.

How does it work?

MMF reduces the inflammation of the bowel which is causing your symptoms, such as diarrhoea, by affecting your body's immune response. Your immune system is very important and helps you fight infections. However, sometimes the immune system can attack the body's own tissues and it is this action that is believed to play a part in IBD.

MMF dampens down this activity and in doing so, reduces the inflammation caused by both Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, although how it does this is not totally understood. This happens in a controlled way so that your body can still fight infection.

What are the benefits of MMF?

MMF reduces inflammation of the bowel which is causing your symptoms such as diarrhoea.

How long will it take to work?

It does not work immediately. It may be a few weeks before you see any benefit.

What dose should I take?

The recommended dose is one gram twice a day but we may start you on a smaller dose initially. Take the dose prescribed by your consultant.

How and when should I take the medication?

Please read the patient information leaflet enclosed with the medication.

Tablets should be swallowed whole and taken with a glass of water on an empty stomach.

What if I miss a dose?

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, miss out the forgotten dose and continue as normal. Do not double up on your next dose.

How long will I need to take MMF?

This will depend on how well the drug suits you and how effective it is in controlling your IBD. If it is successful and you are feeling well, you will be on it long-term, maybe for several years. You will be able to discuss this with your consultant whenever you feel it is necessary.

What monitoring will I need?

You will need to have regular blood tests whilst you are taking MMF. This is because it can cause a fall in your white blood cells and platelets produced by your bone marrow. These cells fight off infection and stop bleeding so if you see any abnormal bruising, or develop a sore throat or infection, you need to tell us as soon as possible. MMF can also cause problems with your liver.

These possible issues can all be monitored through your regular blood tests. At the start of your treatment we will take a baseline reading of your full blood count (FBC) and liver function tests (LFTs). We may also check routine things such as inflammatory markers to assess the degree of inflammation in your body, cholesterol level and your kidney function.

The leaflet that comes with the medication recommends that you have blood tests once a month for the first twelve months of treatment. However, our policy is for more frequent monitoring in the early stages of your treatment. We like to do blood tests once a week for the first four weeks of your treatment.

If you are tolerating the drug well with no problems, this will be reduced to fortnightly for one month, then monthly for three months, then every three months.

However, this may be altered depending on your blood test results.

Who will do the monitoring?

When you start taking MMF, your specialist nurse or consultant will explain to you about how your treatment will be managed. Your specialist nurse will monitor your blood tests initially. However if it is easier for you, we can arrange for your care to be shared between the hospital and your GP.

We will tell you if you need to make any changes to your treatment.

Do not alter the dose or stop the treatment without consulting your hospital specialists first.

What special precautions do I need to take?

As you will be more prone to developing infections when taking MMF, try to avoid people who have any of the following:

- Colds
- Pneumococcal infections
- Measles
- Flu/swine flu
- Chickenpox and shingles
- Tuberculosis (TB)

If you come into contact with anyone who has one of these infections, you must inform your specialist team at the hospital.

It is advisable to have flu, swine flu and pneumococcal vaccines before starting this treatment. Immunisation against chicken pox is also recommended before you begin your treatment. We will explain this to you in more detail before you start the treatment.

Until you know how the drug affects you, it is recommended you do not drive or undertake any hazardous work as some patients can experience dizziness at first.

People receiving this type of drug can be more susceptible to developing certain types of cancers such as lymphomas and skin cancers. Therefore, we recommend that you use high factor sunscreen and avoid excessive exposure to the sun.

Can I take other medicines along with MMF?

Some medicines interact with MMF and cause problems.

Take care when taking antacids (to reduce indigestion), iron tablets and also cholestyramine (Questran) as these reduce the absorption of MMF. These drugs are frequently used in the treatment of IBD.

Other medications can react with MMF. Therefore, it is important to check with your GP before starting any new prescription medications that they will not interact with your MMF treatment. It is also important that you check with a pharmacist before buying any over the counter medicines, including alternative/complementary treatments.

You must tell any other doctor or dentist treating you that you are taking MMF.

Can I have immunisations while on MMF?

If the vaccine is classed as **inactive**, it is safe to have the vaccine. Government guidelines recommend that patients who have a weakened immune system and are at risk of getting infections should have flu/swine flu and pneumococcal vaccines.

The HPV vaccine protects against cervical cancer. For people having immunosuppressive therapy, it is recommended for men and women from age 13 to 26, in those who have not previously been vaccinated. However, full immunity may not be gained while on MMF. Ask your GP for advice about whether you have been vaccinated.

You should avoid vaccines that are classed as **live** such as polio, yellow fever, rubella, MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), chicken pox/shingles and BCG (against tuberculosis).

Your GP surgery nurse will be able to advise you whether a particular vaccination is **inactive** or **live**.

Can I drink alcohol whilst taking MMF?

Although alcohol is not known to have any interaction with MMF, it is best to drink alcohol in moderation, according to government guidelines.

Does MMF affect fertility or pregnancy?

MMF should not be used during pregnancy as it may cause birth defects. Therefore, it is important to inform your doctor or specialist nurse that you want to start a family, before you become pregnant. We want you to be as well as possible and on the least amount of treatment that is effective before you start a family.

MMF should not be taken by **men or women** who are trying for a baby. Couples should avoid pregnancy for at least six weeks before and after stopping MMF.

Can I breastfeed while taking MMF?

The drug has been found to be present in breast milk of women taking it. The manufacturer therefore advises that breastfeeding should be avoided while you are on MMF.

What are the possible side effects of MMF?

All medicines can cause side effects. Side effects of MMF can include:

- Nausea (feeling sick), vomiting (being sick), diarrhoea and abdominal pain
- Hair loss, dizziness and skin rashes
- More likely to get infections
- Suppression of bone marrow resulting in low white blood cell count and low platelets
- Liver damage
- Increased risk of developing certain types of cancers called lymphomas, and skin cancers

The risks are small and in most cases the potential benefits are greater than the possible risks.

There are other risks so we advise you to read the patient information leaflet that comes with the medication.

When should I contact my doctor or specialist nurse?

- If you want to change your dose
- If you have severe side effects
- If you are starting new treatments
- If you are in contact with anyone who has chickenpox or shingles, and you are not already immune
- If you develop any kind of infection, unusual bruising or bleeding
- If you want to start a family
- If you become pregnant unexpectedly

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

IBD Helpline on 01384 456111 ext. 2440 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/gastroenterology/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email patient.information@dgh.nhs.uk

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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