

Haematology

Mycophenolate Mofetil

Information for patients



Why have I been prescribed this medication?

You have been prescribed mycophenolate mofetil as you have immune thrombocytopenia (ITP) or autoimmune haemolytic anaemia. These are disorders in which your body's immune system attacks your healthy blood cells.

Although mycophenolate is not licensed for use for these disorders, there is good evidence to support that it can help to treat them. Please ask for our leaflet 'Unlicensed and off-label medicines' for more information.

How does it work?

Mycophenolate reduces the activity of the immune system. It is often used instead of steroids, which can have long-term side effects.

Mycophenolate usually takes longer to work than steroids – it is often several weeks before it starts to take effect.

How do I take it?

Mycophenolate mofetil comes as either tablets or capsules and is available in two different strengths – 250mg and 500mg. You should take it with or soon after food. The tablets or capsules should be swallowed whole – do not break or crush them, as it is not safe to breathe in the powder.

Do not stop taking the medication unless instructed by your doctor, as you need to take it to keep control of your condition.

What happens if I forget to take a dose?

If more than six hours has passed from the usual time you take your dose then miss that dose and take the next dose at the normal time. Do not double up the dose.

If you take too much mycophenolate please speak to your GP for advice.

What are the possible side effects?

The most common side effects of mycophenolate are nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Taking your total daily dose in divided doses throughout the day can reduce these symptoms. Any side effects you have should improve after a few weeks.

As mycophenolate suppresses the immune system this can cause you to develop anaemia, be more likely to develop infections and more likely to bruise easily.

Occasionally mycophenolate may cause abdominal pain, due to inflammation of the liver or pancreas. This can cause an increase in blood sugar levels.

As with any drug that affects the immune system, there is a small increased risk of developing lymphoma (cancer of the lymphatic system) or skin cancer. You will need to limit your exposure to sunlight and UV light, by wearing clothing that covers exposed skin and using a high factor sunscreen.

Other reported side effects include allergic reactions, high temperature, tiredness, headache, difficulty sleeping, hair loss, a rash and changes to blood pressure.

What should I do if I experience any side effects?

If you experience any signs of infection, such as a high temperature above 37.5°C, a sore throat or cough, you should contact your GP or pharmacist immediately. Please tell them that you are taking mycophenolate mofetil.

You should also seek medical attention if you develop side effects such as unexplained bruising, bleeding, shortness of breath, excessive tiredness, yellowing of your skin or whites of your eyes, or severe itching (signs of liver damage).

If you come into close contact with anyone who has chicken pox or shingles, please tell your GP as soon as possible.

What monitoring is required while taking mycophenolate?

You will need regular blood tests to check your blood cell counts and liver function. This will need to be done at least every 2-4 weeks for two months, and then at 2-3 monthly intervals. You will be told whether the blood tests will be carried out at the Haematology clinic or at your local GP's surgery.

Will mycophenolate interfere with my other medicines?

Before you start any new medicines, you must check with your doctor or pharmacist whether they might interact with mycophenolate, especially those that are not prescribed by a doctor (such as over the counter medication or herbal remedies). It is safe to drink alcohol in moderation whilst on mycophenolate, but this may make any diarrhoea and nausea worse.

Vaccinations

Seasonal vaccination against influenza is recommended for people of any age while they are taking mycophenolate, and also vaccination with a pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine against pneumonia.

Mycophenolate mofetil does not appear to increase the risk of catching influenza, but the illness can be much more severe if you catch it whilst taking this medication.

You should avoid having 'live' vaccinations, such as polio, MMR and the shingles vaccine.

Contraception and pregnancy

The use of mycophenolate in pregnancy has been associated with birth defects and pregnancy loss, so it should **not** be used in pregnancy.

Before starting mycophenolate, if you are female and aged between 15 and 45 years you will need to have two negative result pregnancy tests, carried out 8-10 days apart. These tests may be either urine or blood tests and will be arranged at the hospital.

You should use two effective methods of contraception (for example the contraceptive pill and barrier methods, such as condoms), during treatment with mycophenolate and for 6 weeks after stopping treatment.

If you become pregnant whilst taking mycophenolate do not stop taking the medication. Contact your GP immediately.

If you are male, you should use condoms during treatment (even if you have had a vasectomy) and for at least 90 days after stopping treatment, as it can affect your sperm. If you have a female partner they should also use effective contraception whilst you are being treated and for 90 days after your last dose.

Mycophenolate mofetil and breastfeeding

If you are breastfeeding you should not take mycophenolate.

Where can I find more information?

For more information, the best person to speak to is your doctor (haematologist or GP).

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

Authors: Connor Sweeney and Sue Pavord
Obstetric Haematology Services, OUH
February 2017
Review: February 2020
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Oxford OX3 9DU
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information

