

## METHOTREXATE - SAFE PRESCRIBING - ONCE A WEEK

- ▶ ERRONEOUS PRESCRIBING AND DISPENSING CAUSE THE MOST HARM
- ▶ ALWAYS DOUBLE-CHECK PRESCRIPTIONS
- ▶ ENSURE THERE'S A MONITORING PLAN
- ▶ ADVISE PATIENTS TO REPORT SYMPTOMS OF ADVERSE REACTIONS
- ▶ IT'S A USEFUL AND EFFECTIVE MEDICINE WHEN USED CORRECTLY

The most common cause of significant patient harm occurs when methotrexate is prescribed to be taken daily, followed by pharmacists dispensing the methotrexate accordingly.

Even low-dose oral methotrexate (less than 25mg; taken once a week) is considered to be a high risk medicine because when it is not used correctly, it is associated with a high rate of adverse reactions which may cause serious illness, and/or death.

The dangers of misadventure with methotrexate are well known to health professionals; as recently as 2006, a Nelson woman died after taking her weekly methotrexate dose on a daily basis; this type of incident is often reported in the medical literature.

Please **double-check** prescriptions:  
**right strength** , **right dose** , **right frequency = weekly**

Harm may also occur when there is inadequate monitoring of patients; this is another major cause of serious events. Please ensure there is clarity about prescribing and monitoring responsibilities, i.e. who arranges and reviews laboratory investigations.

[Click here for further information about monitoring](#)

Methotrexate may cause serious side-effects which can occur in the absence of overdose. Health professionals should advise patients to be alert for, and to report, any signs or symptoms suggestive of bone marrow suppression, hepatotoxicity, or pulmonary toxicity.

Compared to second-line DMARDS\*, methotrexate is well tolerated, and even though 70% of patients may experience adverse reactions during the first year of therapy, these side-effects are often not severe enough to warrant discontinuation.

\* Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drug

### KEY REFERENCES

best practice journal; Issue 17, Oct 2008: [www.bpac.org.nz](http://www.bpac.org.nz) keyword "dmard"  
Improving compliance with oral methotrexate guidelines; Patient safety alert, 13. National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA), 1 June 2006: [www.npsa.nhs.uk](http://www.npsa.nhs.uk)

[CLICK HERE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON METHOTREXATE AND A FULL REFERENCE LIST](#)

For further information on other high-risk medicines visit our website at: [www.saferx.co.nz](http://www.saferx.co.nz)

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DISCLAIMER: This information is provided to assist primary care health professionals with the use of prescribed medicines. Users of this information must always consider current best practice and use their clinical judgement with each patient. This information is not a substitute for individual clinical decision making. Issued by the Quality Use of Medicines Team at Waitemata District Health Board, email: [feedback@saferx.co.nz](mailto:feedback@saferx.co.nz)