

Azathioprine

Immunosuppressive medicine

*Pronounced: az-uh-**thigh**-oh-prin (brand name: Imuran)*

What is azathioprine?

Azathioprine is an immunosuppressive medicine (*immunosuppressant*). It helps fight rejection by reducing the number of white blood cells your body makes to attack your new heart. Azathioprine is usually given to patients who cannot take an immunosuppressant called mycophenolate.

Your Dose

Azathioprine doses are based on:

- Your body weight
- Your white blood cell count

How do I take it?

Azathioprine comes in 50 mg tablets. You may need to cut the pills in half to make up your daily dose. For example, if your dose is 125 mg, you would need to take 2½ tablets.

Azathioprine is usually taken once a day, most often at bedtime. You may want to take it with food if it upsets your stomach.

How is it stored?

- Store azathioprine in a closed container away from light.
- Do not store at temperatures over 100°F (37.8°C).

What are the side effects?

Azathioprine can cause some side effects. These should lessen as your dose is lowered. Some side effects are:

Risk of Infection

Because azathioprine lowers your white blood cell count, your risk of getting infections is higher. Please see Chapter 4, “Infections,” for tips on how to prevent infections.

Bone Marrow Suppression

Azathioprine also lowers the number of red blood cells and platelets your bone marrow makes. This can make you feel tired or weak. This is a symptom of anemia, which occurs when you do not have enough red blood cells carrying oxygen around your body. If your platelet count is low, you may bruise easily.

Call your transplant team **right away** if you have:

- Stools that are very dark and look like tar
- Blood in your urine

Liver Toxicity

Azathioprine can cause a type of liver damage called *liver toxicity*. The liver removes waste products and toxins from your blood. If your liver is not working well, these substances are not removed.

Liver toxicity is a rare side effect. It can be reversed if it is found early. It can be very harmful if it is not treated. We will check your liver function often with blood tests.

Call your transplant team **right away** if you have:

- Loss of appetite
- Yellow skin or eyes
- Dark-colored urine
- Pale-colored stools
- Nausea and vomiting

Allergic Reactions

If you have an allergic reaction to azathioprine, the symptoms most often occur soon after you start taking the medicine. Tell your transplant team if you have:

- Fever or chills
- Muscle pain
- Rash

Hair Loss

Hair loss is usually a short-term side effect of taking azathioprine. If you have hair loss, it will happen fairly soon after you start taking the medicine. Most times, your hair will grow back even while you are still taking azathioprine.

Questions?

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

Cardiology Clinic:
Weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.,
call 206-598-4300.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206-744-2500. Say you are a heart transplant patient. A nurse will assess your problem and help you.