

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS CONSIDERING IMURAN (AZATHIOPRINE)
TREATMENT FOR INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE

Your physician has recommended the use of Imuran (azathioprine) for the treatment of your Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. Imuran belongs to a class of drugs known as immunosuppressive agents, which are drugs that slow down the body's immune system. It has an important role in decreasing the inflammation seen in Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Although this medication does not work in all patients with inflammatory bowel disease, approximately 60% to 70% of patients are able to stop steroids after reaching a steady dose. The drug is a very **slow acting one** and may take up to two to three months to reach its full effect.

There are some potential side effects associated with the use of Imuran, as there are for most drugs used in treating inflammatory bowel disease. The most common is lowering of the white blood cell count (leukopenia). These cells are responsible in part for fighting infection so it is important to monitor this effect carefully. This is done by frequent blood counts during initiation of therapy and then every three months. If the white count drops, the drug is either discontinued or the dose is reduced. If there are signs of fever or infection, Imuran is stopped temporarily regardless of the underlying cause.

Pancreatitis, or inflammation of the pancreas, is a side effect that can occur in about approximately 3% to 5% of the patients taking the medication. This is usually manifested by nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. If pancreatitis develops, Imuran should be stopped immediately.

Some patients do report mild nausea and loss of appetite during the early stages of treatment but these symptoms usually disappear. Other rare side effects include fever, rash, lowering of the red blood cells or platelets or inflammation of the liver. These are rarely severe and generally resolve with stopping the medication.

There has been concern raised over the increased incidence of cancer of the lymph glands (lymphoma) in patients receiving Imuran. This has been studied in patients with inflammatory bowel disease. Current thought is that these drugs may increase the risk of lymphoma after many years of use; however, the chance of this occurring is extremely low.

Imuran is potentially dangerous during pregnancy and generally the drug should not be taken unless adequate birth control is used.

Close monitoring with blood tests is essential. While taking this medication laboratory tests recommended by the physician must be done promptly as ordered. In order to continue to refill the medication, compliance with clinic visits and lab tests is mandatory.

Your signature below will indicate that you have read the above material and that I have given you a copy of this for you to keep. The other copy has been placed in your chart.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print name: _____ D.O.B. _____