



## **Birdshot Uveitis Society**

### **Folic acid and methotrexate: some Q&As**

**Please use this Q&A factsheet as background information to help discussion with your doctors. Individual cases may vary enormously, so the best information will always come from your doctors. The information in this factsheet has been checked for accuracy by leading uveitis specialists.**

#### **What is folic acid?**

Folic acid, also known as folate or vitamin B9, helps the body to produce and maintain new cells, including red blood cells.

#### **Why have I been prescribed folic acid as well as methotrexate?**

Because methotrexate is a folate antagonist. This means that, as well as having its immunosuppressant action, methotrexate can lead to folate deficiency in the body. Some of the side-effects of methotrexate, such as nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, mouth ulcers or unwanted effects on the bone marrow or liver function tests, may be caused by low folate levels. Folic acid is prescribed to help balance methotrexate side-effects. In some countries, calcium leucovorin is used instead of folic acid for the same purpose.

#### **How much folic acid should I take and how often should I take it?**

You must always follow your doctor's instructions on how and when to take your folic acid.

Unfortunately, there is no general agreement on how much folic acid to take, nor on how many days it should be taken each week, nor when it should be taken in relation to the weekly methotrexate dose.

In UK, doses of 5mg folic acid are generally used, but 1mg folic acid doses are used in other countries.

Examples of some commonly-used UK folic acid dose regimes for people taking methotrexate are:

- 5mg folic acid once a week, taken on a different day from the methotrexate (British National Formulary)
- 5mg folic acid once a week, taken the day after methotrexate (British Society of Rheumatology)
- 5mg folic acid once a week, taken three days after methotrexate
- 5mg folic acid once a week, taken two days before methotrexate
- 5mg folic acid daily except on the day of taking methotrexate

### **I use methotrexate injections. Do I still need to take folic acid?**

Yes, because the effects of methotrexate on the body's folate levels are the same whether methotrexate is taken by mouth or by injection.

### **I am having some problems with side-effects from methotrexate. What should I do?**

You must speak to your doctor about this. For your health and safety, it is essential that any adjustments to any part of your immunosuppressant treatment are made under close medical supervision.

### **Useful Birdshot Uveitis Society links**

Email address: <mailto:info@birdshot.org.uk>

Website: <https://birdshot.org.uk>

Address: Birdshot Uveitis Society, PO Box 64996,  
London SW20 8PT

Facebook support group: <https://facebook.com/groups/Birdshot/>

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