

# THIOGUANINE

Most patients treated with Thioguanine will experience adverse effects, but the effects will differ from one patient to the next. Symptoms may indicate that the underlying cancer is not under control or has relapses. Cancer patients may also have co-morbid diseases that require treatment and cause symptoms.

The most common adverse effects with Thioguanine are myelosuppression and hyperuricemia.

### ADVERSE DRUG REACTION MANAGEMENT GUIDE

1. **Myelosuppression**
2. **Stomatitis**
3. **Anorexia**
4. **Nausea & vomiting**

#### 1. Myelosuppression

Thioguanine may cause suppression of the blood cell production in the myeloid tissues of the bone marrow. This can result in lowering of white blood cells and platelets. It is important to have a Complete Blood Count (CBC) blood test prior to the start of each cycle of this agent. If any blood cell component is reduced below an acceptable level, the drug may need to be held until the blood cells recover. Thioguanine **must NOT be dispensed** until the CBC test is completed and verified prior to each cycle of the treatment. Verification will be done by an oncology health professional.

**Prevention:** General infection preventative measures should be followed while on this drug, especially if the blood counts are low. Avoid crowds or family/friends with active infections, do not eat uncooked vegetables, wash hands often. If the platelet count is low, tell the patient to take care when shaving or performing any activity of daily living when the skin could be cut.

**Management:** If the patient has a fever or other signs of an infection when the blood counts are low, advise him/her to go directly to the Emergency Department and contact the oncologist when there. The ER staff needs to be told that the patient is taking this drug, and that it is a form of chemotherapy. Empiric antibiotics will be required.

If the patient has unusual bleeding when the platelet counts are low, advise him/her to go to the Emergency Department, tell the ER staff about this drug, and contact the oncologist when there.

#### 2. Stomatitis

Stomatitis (mouth sores) is a common side effect of Thioguanine. Integrity of mucous membranes may be affected by Thioguanine treatment, leading to the swelling and reddening of membranes lining the mouth. Mouth sores or cankers may develop. Patients may complain of changes on the inner cheeks or mouth surfaces, even when mouth sores are not present or only a mild redness is evident. Patients may experience:

- Mouth pain
- Difficulty chewing
- Painful swallowing (dysphagia)

This side effect may lead to Thioguanine dosage reductions. It is important to maintain good oral health during treatment. Aggressive prevention may reduce incidence and severity of stomatitis. Treatment during stomatitis event(s) can relieve symptoms (including oral pain, oral bleeding, dental complications, soft tissue infection and dietary restrictions) and restore oral health, often within 7 to 14 days.

**Prevention and Management:** Good oral care is the key to prevention of stomatitis. If possible, the patient should work with their dentist (and oncologist) to correct any pre-existing dental problems before starting Thioguanine treatment. Careful and thorough oral hygiene is important, and particularly irritating foods (e.g. very spicy foods, rough textures, alcohol-containing foods or liquids) should be avoided.

Management may be achieved in many patients without prescribed therapies. Most important is meticulous oral hygiene:

- Toothbrushing, 3-4 times daily with soft-bristle toothbrush. Soak toothbrush in warm water to soften bristles
- If brushing is painful, Toothettes (sponge-tipped stick with toothpaste), sponges, or gentle use of Waterpik®
- Biotene toothpaste is non-irritating contains natural salivary enzymes to control bacteria
- Floss gently once daily to avoid gum injury
- Salt and baking-soda rinses (1/2 teaspoon of each ingredient in 1 cup of warm water at least 4 times daily, especially after meals)
- Bland rinses, antimicrobial mouthwash (non-alcoholic)
- OTC analgesics, such as ibuprofen (e.g., Advil®, Motrin®) and acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®).

**If the patient has difficulty eating or drinking sufficient fluids or if redness is associated with lesions on the inner cheeks, tongue or lips, contact the cancer care team at once and tell the patient to contact the oncology nurse or oncologist for immediate advice or a visit.**

Topical preparations in widespread use for chemotherapy-induced stomatitis contain ingredients such as lidocaine, benzocaine, milk of magnesia, kaolin, pectin, and diphenhydramine. Although there is no significant evidence of the effectiveness or tolerability of these combinations, there may be a degree of symptom management (e.g. oral pain, improved ability to maintain a proper diet)). Clinical trials in chemotherapy patients with stomatitis have shown no difference in the effectiveness of stomatitis resolution from chlorhexidine mouthwash, “magic” mouthwashes that contain lidocaine, and salt-and-baking soda rinses. Hydrogen peroxide may worsen mouth ulcers. In addition, mouthwash preparations containing *antifungals* (i.e. nystatin), broad-spectrum *antibiotics*, or *corticosteroids* have shown no benefit and possibly further worsening of stomatitis- **these combinations are not recommended!**

### 3. Anorexia

Some patients will experience a decreased appetite while taking Thioguanine.

**Prevention:** Advise patient to:

- Have several small meals a day
- Eat slowly

**Management:**

- Light exercise and fresh air may help
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Eat a high calorie meal plan
- Consider Cyproheptadine to stimulate appetite

### 4. Nausea & vomiting

Nausea and vomiting may occur in some patients on Thioguanine. Unlike the nausea and vomiting often experienced by patients on cytotoxic chemotherapy (acute onset, more emesis than nausea), patients on Thioguanine tend to have nausea of lesser severity and longer duration, with or without emesis. This can be more distressing to patients' quality of life than acute nausea and vomiting. Often patients will have nausea without the relief that comes from emesis.

**Management:** The following may provide relief from nausea and vomiting:

- Prophylactic antiemetic agents (e.g. dopaminergic agents such as prochlorperazine, or promotility agents such as metoclopramide) given with each dose of Thioguanine and repeated as needed for nausea control. While there is no evidence to support the use of dimenhydrinate, there is evidence that ginger products (e.g. Graval<sup>®</sup> Ginger) may be effective, with fewer adverse effects
- Avoid spicy or greasy foods that may contribute to the feeling of nausea. Bland foods, fresh air, and plenty of clear water may reduce the feelings of nausea

#### REFERENCES:

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