

# What are Azathioprine and Mercaptopurine (6-MP)

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## OVERVIEW

Part of a class of drugs known as immunosuppressants, azathioprine (also known as Azasan or Imuran), and mercaptopurine—sometimes also referred to as 6-MP or Purixan—are prescribed for patients with the following gastrointestinal conditions:

- Ulcerative colitis
- Crohn's Disease



Also known as inflammatory bowel disease, these conditions lead to chronic inflammation of the gut.

## **What are the Symptoms of Inflammatory Bowel Disease?**

Common symptoms include:

- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Rectal bleeding
- Mucus in the stool
- Diarrhea
- Urgency to have a bowel movement
- Incontinence
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of weight
- Loss of appetite

## **How do Azathioprine and Mercaptopurine Work?**

Your doctor may prescribe immunosuppressants to be taken orally as a method of treating bowel disease by curbing the effects of inflammation in your bowel.

They work by targeting the immune system. Your genetics, current health, and family history of illness all play a role in the efficacy of these drugs—a board-certified gastroenterologist can help determine whether these medications are right for you.

## **Treatment with is Azathioprine and Mercaptopurine Safe When Performed by a Board-Certified Gastroenterologist**

While side effects such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and liver toxicity can be experienced for some people, 50-60% of patients that are prescribed these immunosuppressants achieve remission from their symptoms of ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease after three to six months of treatment.

Treatment using immunosuppressants for Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis allows patients to reduce or completely eliminate their need for steroids to manage their gastrointestinal symptoms.

Prior to treatment, your doctor may perform a blood test to ensure that your body can safely metabolize the drug. In addition, your doctor will check your blood count and liver tests from time to time to monitor for side effects.

Generally these are safe medications. There are some rare but serious side effects that are potentially fatal. These include infections, blood cell abnormalities, and certain types of cancer including skin cancer and certain blood cancers.