



## Myeloma Haematology and Transplant Unit

# Melphalan oral

This leaflet is offered as a guide to you and your family. The possible benefits of treatment vary; for some people chemotherapy may reduce the risk of the cancer coming back, for others it may control the cancer and its symptoms. Chemotherapy is the most commonly prescribed anti-cancer treatment but other types of treatment are also used. Your doctor will explain to you whether you will receive chemotherapy or another type of treatment, or a combination of both. Your doctor or nurse will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment. You will find it useful to refer to the booklet *Chemotherapy, a guide* which gives general information on chemotherapy and side effects.

### Your treatment

Your doctor or nurse clinician has prescribed for you a treatment with the chemotherapy melphalan. This is given orally as tablets.

These tablets are given daily for 4 days every 4-6 weeks for a minimum of 6 cycles.

Steroid tablets may also be prescribed with melphalan tablets.

We will give you an outpatient appointment every three weeks during treatment to take a blood test to monitor the effects of the chemotherapy.

Alongside your chemotherapy, we will give you other medications to prevent side effects. Please see the separate sheet *Supportive Medications* for details.

This treatment can have serious or possibly life-threatening side effects. It is very important that you report side effects straight away. Don't delay, if you feel unwell, please ring The Christie Hotline on 0161 446 3658. The lines are open 24 hours a day.

### Possible side effects

Chemotherapy can cause many different side effects. Some are more likely to occur than others. Everyone is different and not everyone gets all the side effects. Most side effects are usually temporary, but in some rare cases they can be life-threatening. It is important to tell your hospital doctor or nurse about any side effects so they can be monitored and, where possible, treated.

## Common side effects (more than 1 in 10)

- **Increased risk of serious infection**

You are vulnerable to infection while you are having chemotherapy. Minor infections can become life-threatening in a matter of hours if left untreated. Symptoms of infection include fever, shivering, sweats, sore throat, diarrhoea, discomfort when you pass urine, cough or breathlessness. We recommend that you use a digital thermometer so you can check your temperature. You can buy one from your local chemist.

**If your temperature is 37.5°C or above or below 36°C or you have symptoms of an infection, contact The Christie Hotline straight away.**

- **Anaemia (low number of red blood cells)**

While having this treatment you may become anaemic. This may make you feel tired and breathless. Let your doctor or nurse know if these symptoms are a problem. You may need a blood transfusion.

- **Bruising or bleeding**

This treatment can reduce the production of platelets which help the blood clot. Let your doctor know if you have any unexplained bruising or bleeding, such as nosebleeds, bloodspots or rashes on the skin, and bleeding gums. You may need a platelet transfusion.

- **Strange taste**

Occasionally during treatment you may experience a strange taste, sometimes described as metallic or bitter. A strongly flavoured sweet or mint will help to disguise this.

- **Steroid side effects**

Your **prednisolone tablets** should be taken with food as they may cause indigestion. They may also increase your appetite. It is better to take them earlier in the day, for example, with breakfast and lunch, since they can make you feel more alert and prevent sleep.

These prednisolone tablets can **alter your mood** causing you to feel low, irritable or agitated. Please tell the doctor at your next clinic visit if this is a problem.

## Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

- **Nausea and vomiting (sickness)**

The severity of this varies from person to person. Anti-sickness medication may be given along with your chemotherapy to prevent this. You may also be given anti-sickness tablets to take at home. If you continue to feel or be sick, contact the myeloma nurse specialist because your anti-sickness medication may need to be changed or increased.



- **Diarrhoea**

If this becomes a problem while you are having treatment, anti-diarrhoea medication can be bought from a pharmacy or prescribed by your GP for a temporary period until this is resolved. If this problem persists contact this hospital. **If you develop severe diarrhoea it is important to contact this hospital straight away as this may be a sign of a serious infection. Don't delay!**

- **Lethargy**

Some chemotherapy may make you feel tired and lacking in energy. It can be frustrating when you feel unable to cope with routine tasks. If you do feel tired, take rest and get help with household chores. If necessary, take time off work. Gentle exercise such as walking can be beneficial.

- **Sore mouth**

Your mouth may become sore or dry, or you may notice small mouth ulcers during this treatment. Drinking plenty of fluids and cleaning your teeth regularly and gently with a soft toothbrush can help to reduce the risk of this happening. We can prescribe a mouthwash for you to use during treatment. You can dilute this with water if your mouth is sore. Ask your doctor or nurse for further advice. There is also general mouth care information in the chemotherapy booklet. If you continue to have a sore mouth, please contact The Christie Hotline.

### **Rare side effects (less than 1 in 100)**

- **Hair thinning**

Total hair loss is unusual with this chemotherapy but there may be hair thinning.

- **Skin colouring**

Sometimes as a result of the chemotherapy, your skin may appear darker in colour or lightly tanned, especially around the joints. This is known as hyperpigmentation. The skin will return to normal when treatment is finished. Asian and African-Caribbean people may develop noticeable light patches on their skin.

### **Serious and potentially life threatening side effects**

In a small proportion of patients chemotherapy can result in very severe side effects which may rarely result in death. The team caring for you will discuss the risk of these side effects with you.

## Sex, contraception & fertility

**Protecting your partner and contraception:** We recommend that you or your partner use a condom during sexual intercourse while you are having the course of chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is dangerous to unborn babies and this will also protect you and your partner from any chemotherapy drugs that may be present in semen and in the vagina. If you suspect that you may be pregnant please tell your doctor immediately.

**Fertility:** This chemotherapy may affect your ability to have children. Your doctor or nurse should have discussed this with you. If not, please ask them before you start treatment.

## Late side effects

Some side effects may become evident only after a number of years. In reaching any decision with you about treatment, the potential benefit you receive from treatment will be weighed against the risks of serious long term side effects to the heart, lungs, kidneys and bone marrow. With some drugs there is also a small but definite risk of developing another cancer. If any of these problems specifically applies to you, the doctor will discuss these with you and note this on your consent form.

## Contacts

If you have any general questions or concerns about your treatment, please contact the myeloma nurse specialist or the Haematology and Transplant Unit.

- Myeloma nurse specialist 0161 446 8167
- Haematology and Transplant Unit 0161 446 3925
- General enquiries 0161 446 3000

For urgent advice ring The Christie Hotline on 0161 446 3658 (24 hours)

Your consultant is: .....

Your hospital number is: .....

Your key worker is: .....



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Details of the sources used are available, please contact [Patient.Information@christie.nhs.uk](mailto:Patient.Information@christie.nhs.uk)