



Rituximab

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 an immune treatment called Rituximab. The treatment can be given in a number of ways including on its own or in combination with chemotherapy as part of your lymphoma treatment. The treatment consists of the following:

Rituximab via infusion (drip) over between 60 minutes and a few hours.

Alternatively, Rituximab may be given as a 5-minute injection under the skin. Your doctor will advise you if this way of giving Rituximab is appropriate for you.

You will have a routine blood test and medical review before the start of each cycle of treatment. This is so your team can monitor and manage any side effects as well as assess your response to treatment.

Before you have your treatment with Rituximab, you will be given 2 paracetamol tablets and intravenous (into a vein) injections of an anti-histamine and hydrocortisone. These can help to prevent any immediate allergic reactions.

If you are taking any other medicines

It is important to tell the doctor if you are taking medicine for any other condition such as high blood pressure. Some medicines can react with Rituximab (either weakening or strengthening the effect), so always tell your doctor about any other medicines or tablets you are taking.

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

Rituximab 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.

The side effects listed below relate to treatment with **Rituximab alone**. If you are having Rituximab in combination with chemotherapy, we will give you information about possible side effects of the chemotherapy drugs you are having in a separate information leaflet.

Common side effects (more than 1 in 10)

• Infusion related reactions



The side effects of Rituximab commonly occur while you are having the infusion including chills, fever and shivering. If you have any of these side effects please tell your nurse straightaway, however, your progress will be monitored regularly. Rarely, you may also develop a skin rash, headache, tumour pain, sore throat or sickness. If this happens or you notice any swelling around the eyes and face, feel dizzy or faint, or have any shortness of breath during the chemotherapy, please tell the nurse or doctor immediately. This may be an allergic reaction and they may need to slow down or stop the drip. You may feel tired and have a headache, these symptoms are related to your treatment and usually go when the infusion has finished.

If you do not have any reactions to your first treatment, we may be able to give you subsequent infusions over a shorter period of time.

• Increased risk of serious infection

You are vulnerable to infection as this treatment can cause low white blood cells and/or low antibody levels. 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 pharmacy.

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

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

• Nausea and vomiting (sickness)

You may experience mild nausea while you having Rituximab. Anti-sickness medication will be given along with your treatment to prevent this. If you continue to feel or be sick, contact your GP or this hospital, because your anti-sickness medication may need to be changed or increased.

- **Lethargy**

Rituximab 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.

- **Skin rash**

You may develop a skin rash. This is usually mild and easily treated. Please tell your doctor on your next visit. Sometimes blisters develop on your skin. Inform your doctor if this occurs.

- **Uncommon infections**

Rituximab causes immune suppression and can increase the risk of uncommon or unusual infections. Your doctor will discuss this side effect before you start treatment.

- **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.

- **Hepatitis B**

You must tell your doctor at The Christie before starting Rituximab if you have previously been diagnosed with Hepatitis B. Speak to your doctor if you wish to discuss this further.

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 this treatment. 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: The effect that Rituximab has on fertility is not yet known. Your doctor or nurse should have discussed this with you. If not, please ask them before you start treatment.

Late side effects

There may be long term possible side effects of treatment with Rituximab that are not yet known. Please talk to your doctor if you wish to discuss this further.

Contacts

If you have any general questions or concerns about your treatment, please ring the area where you are having treatment:

- Haematology day unit 0161 446 3924
- Lymphoma clinical nurse specialist 0161 446 8573
- Lymphoma secretaries 0161 446 3753 Professor Radford/Dr Linton
0161 446 8574 Professor Illidge
0161 446 3956 Dr Smith
0161 446 3332 Professor Cowan
0161 446 3302 Dr Harris
0161 446 3869 Dr Bloor
- Palatine Treatment Ward 0161 446 3960/3961 or 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