



Idarubicin and ATRA (Tretinoin)

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 a chemotherapy called idarubicin and a tablet called tretinoin also known as ATRA. ATRA belongs to a group of medicines known as retinoids which are structurally related to vitamin A. ATRA decreases the growth of certain types of diseased blood cells.

Idarubicin is given as a short infusion (10 minutes) on days

We will give you a course of ATRA (tretinoin) tablets. Take these tablets daily (morning and evening) until the course has finished or your doctor or nurse tell you to stop taking them.

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.

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

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)

- **Idarubicin** because of its red colour, may discolour your urine red or pink for the first few times following your injections. This is perfectly normal and nothing to worry about.
- **ATRA (Tretinoin)** can cause headaches and bone pain. If you experience this, please tell your doctor or nurse who can give you a painkiller.

- **Bruising or bleeding**

This treatment can reduce the treatment 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.

- **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.

You will have a routine blood test every day while you are in hospital to monitor the effects of the chemotherapy, but please tell your nurse if you experience any of the symptoms listed above.

- **Mild nausea and vomiting (sickness)**

You may have mild nausea and vomiting. You may be given anti-sickness tablets to take at home. If you continue to feel or be sick, contact your GP or this hospital. Your anti-sickness medication may be changed or increased.

- **Lethargy**

Some chemotherapy can 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 when necessary. Gentle exercise such as walking can be beneficial.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

- **Extravasation** is when chemotherapy leaks outside the vein. If you develop redness, soreness or pain at the injection site **at any time** please let us know straight away.

- **Hair loss**

You may have total loss of hair, although as patients can be given various strengths of idarubicin not all patients will lose their hair. The hair may fall out gradually 10 to 14 days following your first course of treatment. The time scale varies from person to person, Please remember that it is a temporary side effect and your hair will grow back when your treatment is completed. If you would like an appointment with the wig service, this can be arranged for you by visiting the Cancer information centre (department 7). It is a good idea to get your wig before you lose a lot of hair so you can match it to your natural colour. Ask the staff for a copy of the 'Wig fitting service at The Christie'.

Rare side effects (less than 1 in 100)

- **Diarrhoea**

If this becomes a problem during or after your treatment, anti-diarrhoea tablets can be prescribed by your doctor. Ask the staff for a copy of 'Eating: Help yourself' which has some useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

- **Irregular heart beats**

Occasionally this can happen as a result of the idarubicin. It is quite rare if your heart is healthy. Please make sure you tell a doctor if your heart beat feels different from normal or you have pains in the chest. Your doctor can prescribe medicine to help with this.

- **ATRA 'syndrome'**

Rarely the ATRA (tretinoin) may cause you to feel short of breath and you may have a low blood pressure. The nurses will check your blood pressure regularly, but please tell your doctor or nurse if you feel short of breath.

- **Liver toxicity**

Occasionally the treatment may affect the way your liver functions, but this usually returns to normal once your treatment is completed. Your doctor will monitor your liver using blood tests and advise you if there are any problems.

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 Haematology and Transplant Unit.

- Jo Tomlins, Haematology nurse clinician 0161 446 8010
- Haematology and transplant day unit 0161 446 3924
- General enquiries 0161 446 3000
- For urgent advice ring The Christie Hotline 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