



# Azacitidine

This leaflet is offered as a guide to you and your family. The possible benefit of treatment is to eradicate the abnormal bone marrow cells or prevent progression of the disease. This can restore the normal bone marrow function, improving survival and quality of life. Your treatment will be fully explained by your doctor or nurse, who will be happy to answer any questions. 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 called azacitidine.

Azacitidine given as a subcutaneous injection once a day on days 1 to 7 but alternative regimens can be used, such as, days 1 to 5 and 8 to 9.

The course will usually be repeated at 28 days depending on how you respond.

## Possible side effects

Azacitidine is generally well-tolerated but such therapy 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.

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.

## 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 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.**

- **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.

- **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.

- **Skin irritation**

Some redness and/or irritation may occur around the injection site. This is normally only temporary. The nurse or doctor giving you the injections should change the administration site each time. Using a warm or cool pack may help to ease the pain and discomfort at the injection site. Your doctor can prescribe painkillers if needed.

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

- **Nausea**

The severity of this varies from person to person. Anti-sickness medication will be prescribed to prevent this, so it is important to tell your nurse or doctor if you are finding it a problem.

- **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 when necessary. Gentle exercise such as walking can be beneficial.

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

- **Diarrhoea**

If this becomes a problem while you are having treatment, anti-diarrhoea medication 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.

- **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.

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.

## 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

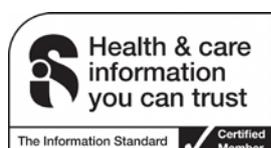
If you have any general questions or concerns about your treatment, please contact the Haematology and Transplant Unit.

- 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