



## Gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>)

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 has prescribed you an anti-cancer treatment called gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>) which is a tablet and is taken by mouth.

Take a single tablet swallowed whole with a glass of water at about the same time each day. It can be taken with or without food. If you forget to take a tablet **do not take a double dose**. Tell your doctor and keep to your regular dose schedule.

While you are taking gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>), we will review you at The Christie on a regular basis (usually monthly). A chest x-ray and blood tests will be done before the review with the doctor or specialist nurse. Treatment will be dispensed on the same day after this review.

If you need medications to reduce stomach acid on a regular basis, these can affect the effectiveness of gefitinib and you should discuss this with your doctor or nurse. If you need to continue to take antacids, these should be taken at least 4 hours before or 2 hours after gefitinib.

We strongly advise current smokers **to stop smoking** while taking this treatment. This is because smoking may reduce the effectiveness of the treatment.

Discuss with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any herbal remedies such as St John's Wort or any change in medication as these may interfere with your treatment

You will have a routine blood test before the start of each cycle of treatment.

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)



- **Rash, itching, dry skin**

It is very common for a rash to occur with gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>). It is most common on the face, neck, chest, and back. The rash tends to be mild. If it occurs, the rash will be at its worst two weeks after starting the treatment. It will then start to settle. It is very important to use a moisturiser at least once a day. We recommend creams such as an aqueous cream, E45<sup>®</sup> or Aveeno<sup>®</sup>.

Avoid exposure to direct sunlight and if you are in the sun cover up your skin as much as possible as you may be more at risk to the effects of the sun.

When you are washing, use non-perfumed soaps and shampoos such as baby products. Limit exposure to water and soaps because this can aggravate any rash already present. If the rash becomes red, painful, itchy or develops an 'acne-like' appearance please call this hospital. Sometimes the dose may need to be changed or delayed for a week or two. If this rash shows signs of infection then your medical team may give you a course of antibiotics.

**Do not** use products to treat acne.

**Do not stop taking gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>) unless it has been discussed with your medical team at The Christie.**

It is not common for itching to occur while using gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>). If your skin does become itchy while taking gefitinib use an antihistamine, such as cetirizine which will be prescribed by your doctor or nurse specialist.



- **Diarrhoea**

Diarrhoea is a common side effect with gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>). If you experience diarrhoea while you are having treatment, use anti-diarrhoea tablets as directed by the medical team such as loperamide. You can also buy these from a pharmacy or get a prescription from your GP for a temporary period until this is resolved. If the problem persists it is important that you contact this hospital. If you experience any diarrhoea please tell your hospital doctor, as treatment dose may need to be changed or delayed.

Ask the staff for a copy of 'Eating: Help Yourself' which has some useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

## **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 treatment to prevent this. You will also be given anti-sickness tablets to take at home. 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.

- **Eye irritation**

This treatment can cause eye irritations, such as dry eyes or conjunctivitis (infection in the eyes). Eye drops can sometimes improve these symptoms. Wearing contact lenses can make the symptoms worse, so we advise not to wear lenses while taking gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>). If you experience eye problems please contact us.

- **Lethargy**

This treatment 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 and get help with household chores. Gentle exercise such as walking can be beneficial. Please ask for a copy of our exercise booklet/DVD called 'Be Active Stay Active'.

- **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.

- **Changes in hair and nails**

The nails may become brittle and their texture or colour may change. Pain in the nail bed, at the base of the nail, may occur, but this is rare. Uncommonly, eyelashes may grow longer while on treatment and some patients have noticed some facial hair growth although this is very fine hair usually.

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

- **Liver damage**

Gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>) can rarely cause damage to the liver. If your blood tests indicate severe changes in your liver function, we may suggest a change in the dose, a delay or stopping treatment.

- **Interstitial lung disease**

A rare side effect from gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>) is a form of lung irritation called interstitial lung disease. If you develop symptoms such as sudden difficulty breathing with a cough or fever contact The Christie Hotline immediately (0161 446 3658).

- **Increased risk of infection**

It is uncommon to develop an infection because of gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>). 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.

- **Bleeding**

Gefitinib (Iressa<sup>®</sup>) can cause bleeding from the stomach and you may vomit blood. If this happens, please contact The Christie Hotline immediately.

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

In a small proportion of patients anti-cancer treatment 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 ring the area where you are having treatment:

- Administration enquiries 0161 918 7606/7610
- Chemotherapy nurse: 0161 918 7171
- Clinical trials unit 0161 918 7663

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

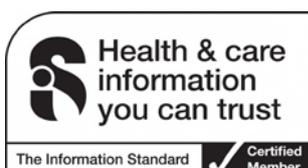
- Jackie Fenemore, Lung Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist 0161 446 3018
- Emma Halkyard, Lung Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist 0161 918 7473
- Your doctor's secretary .....0161 446.....

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)