



Gemcitabine and carboplatin for ovarian cancer

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 for you a treatment which includes the chemotherapy gemcitabine and carboplatin

- Day 1:** **Gemcitabine** is given via a drip over 30 minutes followed by **Carboplatin** via a drip over 1 hour
- Day 8:** **Gemcitabine** via a drip over 30 minutes
- Day 21:** Restart with the next cycle (Day 1)

The treatment is given for 6 cycles.

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

Kidney function: It is important to monitor how your kidneys are working while you are having treatment. We will do this through routine blood tests, or GFR test (most accurate test of kidney function). It is important to drink plenty of fluids (at least 8 cups) the day before and a few days after your chemotherapy

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.



- **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.



- **Immediate allergic reactions:**

Allergic reactions to Carboplatin are uncommon. Please ask the staff for help **immediately** if you notice any of the following: fevers and chills, back pain, shortness of breath, headaches and swelling of the face may occur *during* the time the drug is being given. If this happens please tell the staff straight away. Your doctor may prescribe further medication that can help to reduce these side effects.

Common side effects (more than 1 in 10)



- **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.

- **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 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.

- **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.

- **Skin rash**

You may develop a skin rash. This is usually mild and easily treated. Please tell your doctor on your next visit.

- **Flu-like symptoms and headaches**

Gemcitabine chemotherapy may cause flu-like symptoms such as fever, aches and pains and shivering about 3 to 5 hours after it is given. These symptoms are temporary and should go within 12 to 24 hours. Paracetamol will help. If your symptoms are particularly severe, tell your doctor on your next visit.

- **Change in kidney function**

You may have a small amount of blood or protein in their urine when it is tested. You are very unlikely to notice any change and it rarely causes any harm.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

- **Hair thinning**

Some hair loss may occur during treatment although this is unlikely. It is advisable to avoid perms, colours, use of hot brushes and vigorous, frequent washing that could increase hair loss. Please remember that this 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. Ask the staff for a copy of 'The Wig Fitting Service.'

- **Upset bowels**

You may get upset bowels with this chemotherapy:

Diarrhoea

If this becomes a problem while you are having treatment, anti-diarrhoea tablets can be bought from a pharmacy or prescribed by your GP for a temporary period until this is resolved. If the problem persists contact this hospital. Ask the staff for a copy of '*Eating: Help Yourself*' which has useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

Constipation

Try to drink plenty of fluids. Report this to your hospital doctor or nurse who can advise you regarding diet and who may prescribe a suitable laxative. Ask the staff for a copy of *Eating: Help Yourself* which has useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

- **Taste changes**

You may notice that the food tastes different. Normal taste usually comes back after treatment completed.

Rare side effects (less than 1 in 100)

- **Breathlessness**

Gemcitabine can cause temporary narrowing of the airways, which can cause breathlessness. Let your hospital doctor know if you feel breathless.

- **Tinnitus & high frequency hearing loss**

You may develop tinnitus (ringing in the ears), this sensation should subside when your treatment finishes. High frequency hearing loss can occur with this chemotherapy. Rarely, this may be permanent.

- **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. If you feel pain, tell your doctor or nurse as they can slow the drip to reduce the reaction.

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.

Other medicines

Some medicines can be harmful to take when you are having chemotherapy. Let your doctor know about any medications you are taking, including non-prescribed medicines such as complementary therapies and herbal remedies.

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.

Loss of periods: Due to the effects of chemotherapy on the ovaries you may find that your periods become irregular or may eventually stop. In younger women this may be temporary, but if you are closer to your menopause it may be permanent. This will result in hot flushes, sweats and vaginal dryness.

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)

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