

Oral Etoposide (Lymphoma)

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. 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 chemotherapy capsules called Etoposide.

These are taken daily for 5 to 10 days every 3 to 4 weeks. The capsule should be taken on an empty stomach.

The number of treatments will depend upon how well the treatment is controlling or improving your symptoms and how well you are tolerating the treatment.

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. Occasionally we may not be able to go ahead with your treatment until your blood counts are back to a safe level. If this happens, your chemotherapy may be delayed a week.

- If you are taking any other medicines: It is important to tell the doctor if you are taking medicine for any other condition. Some medicines can react with your treatment. So always tell your doctor at every visit 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

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)

- **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.

- **Low platelets**

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)**

Nausea and vomiting may occur during treatment, the severity of this varies from person to person. Anti-sickness medication will 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 The Christie, because your anti-sickness medication may need to be changed or increased.

- **Sore mouth and altered taste**

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 have a strange taste (metallic or bitter). A strongly flavoured sweet or mint will help to disguise this. Normal taste will usually return after the treatment finishes.

- **Hair loss**

Hair loss is usually total. The hair falls out gradually 10 to 14 days following your first course of treatment. The time scale varies from person to person. Please remember that this is a temporary side effect and your hair will grow back when your treatment is completed. Very rarely, hair loss can be permanent. If you would like an appointment with the wig service, this can be arranged for you by visiting the cancer information centre, or call **0161 446 8100**. Ask the staff for a copy of 'The Wig Fitting Service'. The Maggie's centre runs a head care workshop. Contact Maggie's on **0161 641 4848** or email manchester@maggiescentres.org to arrange an appointment.

- **Lethargy**

Chemotherapy often makes you feel tired and lacking in energy, although this is not usually severe. 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.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)



- **Heart problems**

Although uncommon, Etoposide can cause problems with the blood supply to the heart such as a heart attack or angina; or can cause palpitations or an irregular heartbeat. If you experience chest pain/tightness/heaviness or you feel clammy, or the pain travels up into your neck or down your arm you must **ring 999 or go immediately to your nearest Accident and Emergency department.**

- **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.

- **Gastro-intestinal upset**

This treatment can sometimes cause indigestion, abdominal pain or diarrhoea. Let your doctor know if you have any of these symptoms. If you have abdominal pain with nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea, contact The Christie Hotline without delay.

- **Skin rashes**

Some people can get a rash when receiving oral Etoposide. The rash may be itchy and need treatment with antihistamines and/or steroid creams. If it is very troublesome, the oral Etoposide may need to be stopped temporarily and restarted at a lower dose. Your skin may also appear darker in colour or lightly tanned, especially around the joints. This is known as hyperpigmentation. This should return to normal once your treatment has finished.

Rare side effects (less than 1 in 100)

- **Tingling & numbness in the fingers or toes/muscle weakness**

This is usually only mild and temporary. It can sometimes last for some time or become permanent. Sometimes you may also have difficulty controlling the muscles in your arms and legs or your balance. Please report these symptoms to your doctor on your next hospital visit.

- **Second cancers**

Rarely acute leukaemia can occur with this chemotherapy when it is given with other chemotherapy drugs. Speak to your doctor if you wish to discuss this further.

- **Tumour Lysis Syndrome**

Although this is rare with Etoposide capsules, this treatment may cause the rapid breakdown of lymphoma cells which may lead to abnormalities in the blood. This problem is more likely if you have a lot of disease or if your kidneys do not work as well as they should do. Your doctor will tell you if you are at risk. You may be given a kidney-protective medicine called allopurinol for the first cycle of treatment, and your doctor may do additional blood tests to monitor this side effect. We sometimes admit patients for the first treatment to give intravenous fluids and kidney-protective medication and twice daily monitoring of blood tests for 48 hours.

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 ring the area where you are having treatment:

- Haematology day unit **0161 446 3924**
- Lymphoma clinical nurse specialists **0161 446 8573**
- Lymphoma secretaries **0161 446 3753** Professor Radford/Dr Linton
0161 446 3360 Professor Illidge
0161 446 3956 Dr Smith
0161 446 3332 Professor Cowan
0161 446 3302 Dr Harris/Dr Chan
0161 446 3869 Dr Bloor
- Palatine Treatment Ward **0161 446 3960/3961**
- General enquiries **0161 446 3000**

Your consultant is:

Your hospital number is:

Your key worker is:

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

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Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice

The Christie Hotline:
0161 446 3658

Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

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