

## Gefitinib (Iressa®)

Gefitinib is a type of anti-cancer treatment called targeted therapy. The aim of this treatment is to control the cancer and its symptoms. Your doctor or nurse will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment.

You may find it useful to refer to the booklet 'Chemotherapy, a guide' which gives general information on staying well during anti-cancer treatments.

### Your treatment

Your doctor has prescribed you an anti-cancer treatment called gefitinib (Iressa®) 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 for more than 12 hours after it is due **DO NOT take a double dose**. Tell your doctor and keep to your regular dose schedule.

While you are taking Gefitinib, 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. The treatment will continue for as long as you are benefitting from it.

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 having this treatment.** If you would like help with stopping smoking, please let your doctor or nurse know and they can arrange support for you.

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.

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.



## Flu vaccinations

**Is it alright for me to have a flu jab during the time I'm having chemotherapy?** It's safe to have a flu jab, but depending on the sort of chemotherapy you have had, it may not give quite as much protection against infection as usual. Some patients may need two vaccinations. However, if you're thinking of having any other vaccinations, do check with your Christie doctor first, because some vaccines should be avoided.

## Possible side effects

Your treatment 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)

### • Decreased appetite

You may lose your appetite and find eating large meals more difficult. It is best to try to eat smaller portions but do carry on trying to eat something even if you do not feel very hungry. Ask your nurse or doctor for advice on what to eat if this is causing you problems or you have unexpected weight loss. Ask staff for a copy of the booklet 'Eating - help yourself'.

### • Rash, itching, dry skin (Warning!)

It is very common for a rash to occur with gefitinib. 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 E45® or Aveeno®.

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, unless it has been discussed with your medical team at The Christie.**

It is not common for itching to occur while using gefitinib. 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 (Warning!)

Diarrhoea is a common side effect with gefitinib. 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. If you develop severe diarrhoea it is important to contact The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658** straight away. Don't delay!

Ask the staff for a copy of 'Eating - help yourself' which has some useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

- **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 The Christie, because your anti-sickness medication may need to be changed or increased.

- **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 on **0161 446 3658**.

- **Liver damage**

Gefitinib 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.

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

- **Kidney damage**

This treatment can rarely cause damage to the kidney. This is usually mild and unlikely to cause symptoms. If your blood tests indicate severe damage to the kidney function, we may suggest a change on the dose or if needed stopping treatment.

- **Inflammation of your bladder lining**

Please contact the team if you develop pain, burning or stinging when you urinate; or if needing to urinate more often and urgently than normal.

Other signs of inflammation may include urine that's dark, cloudy or strong smelling or pain low down in your tummy.

- **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. 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 a daily walk can be beneficial. Please ask for a copy of our exercise booklet called 'Be Active, Stay Active'.

- **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 usually very fine hair.

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

- **Inflammation of the pancreas**

Please contact us if you develop severe abdominal pain, nausea, a high temperature or diarrhoea.

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- **Interstitial lung disease**

A rare side effect from gefitinib 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 on **0161 446 3658**.

- **Increased risk of infection**

It is uncommon to develop an infection. 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.**

- **Bleeding**

Gefitinib can cause bleeding from the stomach and you may vomit blood. If this happens, or you have any other unusual bleeding (such as nosebleeds, bleeding gums or blood in your urine) while taking gefitinib, please contact The Christie Hotline immediately on **0161 446 3658**.

## 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 and 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**

Lung cancer nurse team - **0161 918 2595**

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

Your doctor's secretary .....0161 .....

Your consultant is: .....

Your hospital number is: .....

Your key worker is: .....

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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.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



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