

Venetoclax (AML)

The possible benefits of this treatment vary; for some people it 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 can 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 called Venetoclax which belongs to a class of cancer medicines called BCL2 inhibitors. BCL2 is a protein that some leukaemia or cancer cells make too much of. Venetoclax is used to treat adults with acute myeloid leukaemia (AML), a cancer of certain white blood cells.

Venetoclax is used in combination with another drug called Azacitidine for older AML patients where intensive chemotherapy would not be safe.

This will be given in cycles, each cycle lasting 28 days. Venetoclax comes as a tablet and is taken once daily.

You will have routine blood tests before the start of each cycle and during the cycle. 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 treatment may be delayed a week. You may need a transfusion of blood or platelets while taking this medication, depending on the results of your blood tests.

You should not drink grapefruit juice, eat grapefruit, Seville oranges (often used in marmalades), or starfruit while you are taking venetoclax. These foods may increase the amount of venetoclax in your blood.

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.

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 passing urine, cough or breathlessness. We recommend that you use a thermometer so you can check your temperature. You can buy one from your local chemist.

If your temperature is 37.5°C or above, or below 36°C or you have symptoms of an infection, contact The Christie Hotline straight away.



Possible side effects

Chemotherapy can cause many different side effects. Some are more likely to occur than others. We are all different, so we may get different side effects with varying severity. 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)

- **Low white count**

There is a risk of infection, particularly respiratory infections such as pneumonia. There is also a risk of shingles.

- **Bruising or bleeding**

This treatment can reduce the production of platelets which help the blood to clot. Tell your doctor if you have unexplained bruising or bleeding, such as nosebleeds, bloodspots or rashes on the skin and bleeding gums. You may need a platelet infusion.

- **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.

- **Gastrointestinal disturbance**

This treatment can cause constipation, diarrhoea, nausea, an increase or decrease in weight. It is important to drink plenty of fluid and maintain a balanced diet. Please report any of these symptoms to your nurse or doctor.

- **Oedema**

This treatment may cause water retention in the face, hands or feet/ankles. If this happens to you, please let us know.

- **Lethargy**

This treatment may make you feel tired, short of breath or 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.

- **Aches and pains**

This medication may cause muscular or joint aches and pains. It can also cause headaches. A simple painkiller such as paracetamol may help with this. If you find that symptoms are persistent or unmanageable then speak to your doctor.

- **Electrolyte imbalance**

This treatment may cause some of the electrolytes in your blood such as potassium and phosphate to rise. You may be prescribed some medication to correct this. Please let your doctor know if you are suffering from palpitations or muscle weakness.

The following symptoms require medical attention, but are not an emergency. Contact your health care provider within 24 hours of noticing any of the following:

- Nausea (interferes with ability to eat and if unrelieved, with prescribed medication)
- Vomiting (vomiting more than 4-5 times in a 24 hour period)
- Diarrhoea (4-6 episodes in a 24-hour period)
- Constipation unrelieved by laxative use.
- Extreme fatigue (unable to carry on self-care activities)
- Mouth sores (painful redness, swelling and ulcers)
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Swelling of the feet or ankles. Sudden weight gain.
- Signs of infection such as redness or swelling, pain on swallowing, coughing up mucus, or painful urination.
- Unable to eat or drink for 24 hours or have signs of dehydration: tiredness, thirst, dry mouth, dark and decreased amount of urine, or dizziness.

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.

• Sepsis

This is a severe infection that is classified as a medical emergency. Symptoms include feeling dizzy or faint, slurred speech, severe muscle pain, fever, shivering, sweats, severe breathlessness, sore throat, diarrhoea, discomfort when passing urine or production of less urine.

Contact The Christie Hotline on 0161 446 3658 straightaway if you develop any of the above symptoms.

• Tumour Lysis Syndrome (TLS)

TLS is a serious side effect caused by the fast breakdown of cancer cells. It is very important that you tell your doctor straight away if you experience any of the following- fever, chills, confusion, irregular headaches, shortness of breath, seizures.

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.

Sex, contraception and fertility

Pregnancy and breast-feeding

Venetoclax may harm your unborn baby and should not be used during pregnancy. Women taking Venetoclax who are able to become pregnant should use an effective method of contraception during treatment with Venetoclax and for at least 6 months after stopping Venetoclax. If you use a hormonal contraceptive, you must also use a barrier method, such as a condom or a diaphragm. Men taking Venetoclax whose partners are able to become pregnant should use an effective method of contraception during treatment with Venetoclax and for at least 4 months after stopping the treatment.

You should not breast-feed during treatment with Venetoclax and for at least 2 months after stopping the treatment.

If you are pregnant, think you may be pregnant or are planning to have a baby, ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for advice before taking this medicine.

Other medicines and Venetoclax

Tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you are taking, have recently taken or might take any other medicines. Venetoclax may affect the way these medicines work, or these medicines may affect how Venetoclax works.

In particular, tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you are taking any of the following medicines:

- medicines used to treat fungal infections such as voriconazole, posaconazole or itraconazole;
- medicines used to treat bacterial infections such as erythromycin, clarithromycin or azithromycin;
- medications for seizures such as carbamazepine, phenytoin
- medicines used to treat high blood pressure (hypertension) such as captopril or carvedilol;
- medicines used to treat infections with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) such as ritonavir, indinavir, lopinavir
- medicines used to treat heart problems, such as digoxin, amiodarone, diltiazem, verapamil
- St. John's wort (also known as Hypericum perforatum), a herbal medicine used to treat depression.

If you normally take any of these medicines, your doctor might change it and prescribe a different medicine for you during your treatment with Venetoclax.

Missed doses

If a dose is more than 8 hours late, the missed dose should not be taken and the next dose should be taken at the normal time.

Contacts

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

- Lisa Jeffery, Decima Govett or Emma Whitham, **0161 918 7962**
Haematology nurse specialists
- Haematology 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:

Notes:

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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