

Azacitidine

The possible benefit of this treatment is to eradicate the abnormal bone marrow cells or prevent progression of the disease. This can restore the normal bone marrow, improving survival and quality of life. Your treatment will be fully explained by your doctor or nurse, who will be happy to answer any questions.

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 a treatment called azacitidine.

Azacitidine is given as a subcutaneous injection once a day on days 1 to 7, but alternative regimens can be used such as on days 1 to 5 and 8 to 9.

The course will usually be repeated at 28 days depending on how you respond.

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

Azacitidine is generally well-tolerated, but such therapy 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.

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.

Possible side effects

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.



Common side effects (more than 1 in 10)

- **Bruising or bleeding**

This treatment can reduce the production of platelets which help the blood clot. Tell your doctor 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.

- **Aching or pain in joints or muscles**

After having Azacitidine you may find that you get aches and pains in your joints and muscles. If you experience this, please discuss it with your doctor who can prescribe you painkillers.

- **Headaches**

Azacitidine can cause headaches. Taking painkillers can help relieve them. If you find they persist, speak to your doctor.

- **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.

- **Skin irritation**

Some redness and/or irritation may occur around the injection site. This is normally only temporary. The nurse or doctor giving you the injections should change the administration site each time. Using a warm or cool pack may help ease the pain and discomfort at the injection site. Your doctor can prescribe painkillers if needed.

- **Diarrhoea**

This is usually very mild as you are receiving a very low dose of chemotherapy. Anti-sickness medication can be prescribed to prevent this, so it is important to tell your nurse or doctor if you are finding it a problem.

- **Nausea**

This is usually very mild as you are receiving a very low dose of chemotherapy. Anti-sickness medication can be prescribed to prevent this, so it is important to tell your nurse or doctor if you are finding it a problem.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

- **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 when necessary. Gentle exercise such as walking can be beneficial.

- **Sore mouth and taste changes**

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 experience a **strange taste**, sometimes described as metallic or bitter. A strongly flavoured sweet or mint will help to disguise this.

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 and fertility

Protecting your partner and contraception: We recommend that you or your partner use a barrier form of contraception 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:

Haematology clinical nurse specialists	0161 918 7962
Haematology and Transplant day unit	0161 446 3924
General enquiries	0161 446 3000
For urgent advice ring The Christie Hotline	0161 446 3658 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

Your consultant is:

Your hospital number is:

Your key worker is:

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 2 vaccinations. However, if you're thinking of having any other vaccinations, do check with your Christie doctor first, because some vaccines should be avoided.

COVID-19 vaccinations

We advise that all patients receive a COVID-19 vaccination when this is offered. Your doctor will discuss with you the best time to have this.

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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, Salford or Macclesfield. 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