

## Nab-paclitaxel and Gemcitabine

The possible benefits of treatment vary; for some people this 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 a treatment which includes the chemotherapy Nab-paclitaxel and Gemcitabine.

Nab-paclitaxel is given into the vein (intravenously) through a fine tube (cannula) as an infusion over 30 minutes.

Gemcitabine is given into the vein (intravenously) over 30 minutes.

Both treatments are given every week for 3 weeks with a break on the 4th week. Treatment is given for ..... cycles.

Treatment is given until your disease progresses or the occurrence of side effects which require the stopping of treatment.

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

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 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.



After Cycle 2 of treatment, if clinically possible you will have your treatment at a location closer to home. The Christie is committed to providing treatment closer to home as part of the Outreach and Christie at Home service.

- **Extravasation (Warning!)**

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.

- **Allergic reaction (Warning!)**

Signs of an allergic reaction include skin rashes, itching, a high temperature, shivering, redness of the face, a feeling of dizziness, headache, breathlessness, anxiety, and a desire to pass urine. You will be monitored for any sign of an allergic reaction during treatment. It is important to tell your nurse or doctor if you have any of these signs.

- **Anaemia (low number of red blood cells) (Warning!)**

While having this treatment you may become anaemic. This may make you feel tired and breathless. Let your Christie doctor or nurse know if these symptoms are a problem. You may need a blood transfusion.

- **Bruising or bleeding (Warning!)**

This treatment can reduce the production of platelets which help the blood clot. Let your Christie doctor or nurse know if you have any unexplained bruising or bleeding, such as nosebleeds, bloodspots or rashes on the skin, and bleeding gums.

## 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

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)

- **Hair loss**

Hair loss is usually total. The hair falls out gradually 10 to 14 days following your first course of treatment. Body and facial hair can also fall out. 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 complete. Very rarely, hair loss can be permanent.

The cancer information centre offers a coping with hair loss service to all patients where support, information and advice will be given. Drop in, contact **0161 446 8100** or email [informationcentre@christie.nhs.uk](mailto:informationcentre@christie.nhs.uk). Information about the wig service can also be found here and vouchers for wigs can also be obtained for eligible patients. The wig room provide a drop in service, Please see The Christie leaflet 'The wig fitting service' for further information.

The Maggie's Centre runs a Talking Heads hair loss support workshop for anyone who is anticipating or

experiencing hair loss (both men and women). These sessions cover the practicalities of hair loss as well as offering support with its emotional impact. Contact Maggie's on **0161 641 4848** or email [manchester@maggiescentres.org](mailto:manchester@maggiescentres.org).

- **Tingling and numbness in the fingers or toes**

This is due to the effect of nab-paclitaxel on the nerves and is known as peripheral neuropathy. You may also notice that you have difficulty doing up buttons or similar tasks. Tell your doctor if you notice any numbness or tingling in your hands or feet. This usually improves with a break from treatment or after treatment has finished, although it may take weeks / months to do so and can be permanent.

- **Flu-like symptoms**

Some chemotherapy may cause flu-like symptoms such as fever, aches and pains and shivering about 3 to 5 hours after your treatment. These symptoms should be 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.

- **Fatigue**

Some chemotherapy may make you feel tired and lacking in energy. It can be frustrating when you feel unable to cope with routine tasks. You may benefit from additional support during your treatment. Complementary therapies may be helpful. Speak to your nurse or doctor for further information. If necessary, take time off work. Gentle exercise, such as walking can be beneficial.

- **Joint and muscle pain**

Pain in the joints (also called arthralgia) or muscles (also called myalgia) can be a temporary side effect while having chemotherapy. It is important to tell your doctor or nurse about this, so that appropriate painkillers can be prescribed.

- **Diarrhoea (Warning!)**

If this becomes a problem while you are having treatment, contact The Christie Hotline for advice. **If you develop severe diarrhoea it is important to contact The Christie straight away as this may be a sign of a serious infection. Don't delay!**

- **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.

- **Sensitivity to the sun**

Some chemotherapy can make your skin more sensitive to the sun than usual. Sit in the shade, avoid too much sun and use a high factor sunblock cream. Asian and African-Caribbean people may develop noticeable light patches on their skin.

- **Changes to nails**

Your nails may become brittle and their texture or colour may change. These changes grow out over a few months once the treatment has finished. Pain at the nail bed (at the base of the nail) may occur, but is rare. Acrylic nails are not recommended.

- **Constipation**

This occasionally occurs after several treatments with nab-paclitaxel or due to the anti-sickness medication. Try to drink plenty of fluids and eat foods high in fibre. Tell your doctor who may prescribe a

suitable laxative. Ask the staff for a copy of The Christie booklet 'Eating: help yourself' which has useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

- **Skin rash**

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

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

- **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.

- **Fluid retention**

Your feet/legs may become swollen on this chemotherapy. If this is mild, no specific treatment is needed. Keeping your feet and legs raised may help. Tell your doctor if the swelling is severe.

- **Blood clots (Warning!)**

During chemotherapy you are more at risk of blood clots in the legs (DVT) or lungs (PE). Occasionally these clots can be life-threatening. To help prevent clots, keep mobile and drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids.

- **Liver function**

Your liver may be temporarily affected. Nab-paclitaxel may cause changes in the way that your liver works. This is very unlikely to cause you any harm, but your doctor will monitor this carefully. Samples of your blood will be taken at set intervals to check your liver is working properly.

- **Abdominal pain**

This may start a few days after finishing chemotherapy and may last for a few days. Please contact the hospital if this happens. Your doctor can prescribe painkillers if appropriate.

- **Low blood pressure**

Your blood pressure will be checked during your treatment. Let the doctor know if you feel faint or dizzy.

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

- **Breathlessness**

Very rarely this chemotherapy can cause inflammation of your lungs. This can make you breathless. Tell your doctor if you develop this problem while you are having this chemotherapy.

## **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, nurse or pharmacist know about any medications you are taking, including non-prescribed medicines purchased over the counter or complementary therapies and herbal remedies.

## 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**

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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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