

Trastuzumab (Metastatic breast cancer)

What is Trastuzumab?

Trastuzumab is a monoclonal antibody that uses a targeted approach to treat breast cancer. This type of treatment targets specific areas of cancer cells and blocks the cell process stopping the cancer growing. Trastuzumab is one of the first of this class of treatments to be approved for clinical use.

Trastuzumab is only effective when the breast cancer cells have more HER2 protein than normal and this is classified as HER2 positive. About 1 person in 5 with breast cancer is HER2 positive. A test is carried out to identify this protein.

A test will have been carried out to identify your HER2 status before you and your doctor decide the treatment that is best for you.

Your treatment

Treatment is given by either subcutaneous route (those on single therapy) or intravenous route (those in combination with chemotherapy).

Intravenous Trastuzumab

Trastuzumab is given into the vein (intravenously) through a fine tube (cannula) as an infusion over a period of 30 - 90 minutes.

Trastuzumab is given every 3 weeks with your chemotherapy. The dose is calculated based on your body weight.

Cycle 1 is given over 90 minutes followed by a 6 hour observational period.

Cycle 2 is given over 30 minutes followed by a 2 hour observational period.

Cycle 3 onwards is given over 30 minutes with no observational period providing there were no previous infusion reactions.

Subcutaneous Trastuzumab

Trastuzumab is given a subcutaneous injection just below the skin surface of your thigh over a period of 3-5 minutes. The recommendation is to alternate thighs with each cycle.

Trastuzumab is given every 3 weeks until disease progression.

Each cycle will be prescribed at the same dose: 600mg.

Cycle 1 is given over 3-5 minutes followed by a 6 hour observational period.

Cycle 2 is given over 3-5 minutes followed by a 2 hour observational period.

Cycle 3 to 18 is given over 3-5 minutes.

You do not need a routine blood test for Trastuzumab treatment.

You will need to have a heart scan, echocardiogram or MUGA scan before you start Trastuzumab treatment and then every 18 weeks to monitor any effects of the drug on your heart.

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

This 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)

• Flu like symptoms

Occasionally you may experience chills, fever or rhinitis (runny nose) one or two days after treatment. These symptoms can be reduced or controlled by taking medication such as paracetamol. If you are receiving Trastuzumab with chemotherapy, please monitor your temperature and contact the hospital if your temperature is 37.5°C or above, or below 36°C or if you experience any symptoms of an infection.

• Reactions

Less commonly, people may experience an allergic reaction with the first or second cycle. This may involve a headache, dizziness, rash or breathlessness. If any of these symptoms occur, call your nurse immediately. These symptoms are usually mild and temporary.

• Injection site

You may experience discomfort, including mild stinging, bruising or redness in the injection area. This is usually mild and temporary.

• Joint and muscle pain

Aches and pains can be experienced in the joints (arthralgia) and muscles (myalgia) during and post Trastuzumab. The severity of this varies from person to person. It is important to inform the hospital and then 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 straightaway as this may be a sign of a serious infection. Don't delay!**

• Lethargy

Trastuzumab can have an effect on energy levels and you may experience insomnia. This can be very frustrating and you may benefit from additional support and advice at this time. Complementary therapies may be helpful. Speak to the Trastuzumab team for further information. Gentle exercise such as walking, can be beneficial.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

• Effects on the heart

Trastuzumab can sometimes affect your heart function. We will assess your heart function by a MUGA scan or echocardiogram before you start your treatment and this will be repeated at 3-6 month intervals. If you experience any unusual shortness of breath, swelling of your ankles, a rapid heartbeat or palpitations, please contact The Christie immediately.

• Pneumonitis (breathlessness)

Some patients may experience a feeling of breathlessness, or develop a cough. If this happens please tell your doctor or contact The Christie so that investigations and treatment can be undertaken.

Late side effects

Long term possible side effects of treatment with Trastuzumab are not yet completely known. The doctor can discuss any concerns you may have.

Contraception

We recommend that you use a form of contraception to avoid pregnancy throughout your Trastuzumab treatment, and up to 7 months after your last dose of Trastuzumab. If you suspect you may be pregnant please contact the hospital immediately.

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**

Breast care nurses - **0161 446 3996**

For urgent 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.

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We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact patient.information@christie.nhs.uk

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

