

Rituximab

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 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 an immune treatment called rituximab. The treatment can be given in a number of ways including on its own or in combination with chemotherapy as part of your lymphoma treatment. The treatment consists of the following:

Rituximab via infusion (drip) over between 60 minutes and a few hours.

Alternatively, rituximab may be given as a 5 minute injection under the skin. Your doctor will advise you if this way of giving Rituximab is appropriate for you.

You will have a routine blood test and medical review 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 is so your team can monitor and manage any side effects as well as assess your response to treatment.

Before you have your treatment with Rituximab, you will be given 2 paracetamol tablets and an anti-histamine tablet. These can help to prevent any immediate allergic reactions.

If you are taking any other medicines

It is important to tell the doctor if you are taking medicine for any other condition such as high blood pressure. Some medicines can react with rituximab (either weakening or strengthening the effect), so always tell your doctor about any other medicines or tablets you are taking.

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

Rituximab 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.

The side effects listed below relate to treatment with rituximab alone. If you are having rituximab in combination with chemotherapy, we will give you information about possible side effects of the chemotherapy drugs you are having in a separate information leaflet.

Common side effects

• Infusion related reactions (Warning!)

The side effects of rituximab commonly occur while you are having the infusion including chills, fever and shivering. If you have any of these side effects please tell your nurse straightaway, however, your progress will be monitored regularly. Rarely, you may also develop a skin rash, headache, tumour pain, sore throat or sickness. If this happens or you notice any swelling around the eyes and face, feel dizzy or faint, or have any shortness of breath during the chemotherapy, please tell the nurse or doctor immediately. This may be an allergic reaction and they may need to slow down or stop the drip. You may feel tired and have a headache, these symptoms are related to your treatment and usually go when the infusion has finished.

If you do not have any reactions to your first treatment, we may be able to give you subsequent infusions over a shorter period of time.

• 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.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

• Nausea and vomiting (sickness)

You may experience mild nausea while you having rituximab. Anti-sickness medication will be given along with your treatment to prevent this. 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.

• Lethargy

Rituximab 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 and get help with household chores. If necessary, take time off work. Gentle exercise such as walking can be beneficial.

• Skin rash

You may develop a skin rash. This is usually mild and easily treated. Please tell your doctor on your next visit. Sometimes blisters develop on your skin. Inform your doctor if this occurs.

• Uncommon infections

Rituximab causes immune suppression and can increase the risk of uncommon or unusual infections. Your doctor will discuss this side effect before you start treatment.

• 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.

• Hepatitis B

You must tell your doctor at The Christie before starting rituximab if you have previously been diagnosed with Hepatitis B. Speak to your doctor if you wish to discuss this further.

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 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

There may be possible long term side effects of treatment with rituximab that are not yet known. Please talk to your doctor if you wish to discuss this further.

Contacts

If you have any general questions or concerns about your treatment, please ring the area where you are having treatment:

Haematology day unit - **0161 446 3924**

Lymphoma clinical nurse specialists - **0161 446 8573**

Lymphoma secretaries:

0161 446 3753 - Professor Radford/Dr Linton

0161 446 8574 - Professor Illidge

0161 446 3956 - Dr Smith

0161 446 3332 - Professor Cowan

0161 446 3302 - Dr Harris/Dr Chan

0161 446 3869 - Dr Bloor

Palatine treatment ward - **0161 446 3960/3961** or **3925**

General enquiries - **0161 446 3000**

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 **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