

## Methotrexate

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. Chemotherapy is the most commonly prescribed anti-cancer treatment but other types of treatment are also used. 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 methotrexate.

Methotrexate is given directly into the vein via a drip with fluids. You will usually be admitted for approximately 3 days per dose.

Before you are given methotrexate, we will test your urine to make sure that it is not acidic. This is to make sure that your body can remove the residues of the chemotherapy through the urine. We will continue to test your urine throughout the treatment and give you medication to prevent your urine from becoming acidic.

After your chemotherapy, we will routinely test your blood to see how much methotrexate is left in your blood. We will give you a medication called folinic acid as an injection or a tablet to help your body recover. This is called the folinic acid rescue. The dose of folinic acid and the length of the time you need to have this will depend on the results of your blood test.

You will have a routine blood test before the start of each cycle of treatment. You may also receive a drug called asparaginase. There is a separate information leaflet for this.

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.

**Medicines to be avoided on this regimen:** Do not take any medicines that contain aspirin, ibuprofen or co-trimoxazole. Be careful! Some cold remedies and painkillers contain aspirin and ibuprofen. Check with your pharmacist and tell them you are having treatment with methotrexate. Please ask your doctor at The Christie for advice about any other medication you are taking, including non-prescribed medicines, complementary therapies and herbal medicines.



## 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.**

## 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)

### • 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.

### • Bruising or bleeding

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

### • 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 may 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.

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

### • Hair loss

Hair loss is usually total. The hair falls out gradually 10 to 14 days following your first course of treatment. 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 completed. 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, phone **0161 446 8100** or email **the-christie.informationcentre@nhs.net**. Information about the wig service can also be found here and vouchers for wigs can also be obtained for eligible patients. The wig room provides a drop-in service, please see The Christie leaflet 'The wig fitting service' for further information.

The Maggie's Centre can support you with hair loss by helping you consider the practicalities as well as the emotional impact. You can call into Maggie's Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm to speak with their professional team. Maggie's provide expert care and support to everyone with cancer and those who love them. Contact Maggie's on **0161 641 4848**, email: **manchester@maggies.org** or drop in, their address is The Robert Parfett Building, 15 Kinnaird Road, Manchester, M20 4QL.

- **Diarrhoea**

If this becomes a problem while you are having treatment, anti-diarrhoea medication can be prescribed by your GP for a temporary period until this is resolved. If this problem persists contact The Christie for advice.

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

- **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.

- **Sore eyes**

You may get a dry, gritty feeling in your eyes following treatment. If this happens, using Hypromellose eye-drops will help to ease the discomfort. If the problem persists contact this hospital. Your eyes may also water. This will improve in time and needs no specific treatment.

- **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. Dark skinned people may develop noticeable light patches on their skin.

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

- **Extravasation**

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 straightaway.

## **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. For some treatments it is advised that contraception is used and pregnancy is avoided for 6-12 months after the last dose of treatment. If you have received one of these treatments the medical team will discuss this with you.

**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 any 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:

Haematology nurse specialists - **0161 918 7962**

Haematology and transplant unit - **0161 446 3924**

General enquiries - **0161 446 3000**

For advice ring The Christie Hotline on **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