

Oral etoposide

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 has prescribed for you chemotherapy capsules called Etoposide.

These are usually taken daily for up to 21 days, repeated in cycles every 4 weeks, or can sometimes be taken at a lower dose for a longer period of time. Your doctor will explain how you should take them. The capsule(s) should be taken on an empty stomach 2 hours after and 1 hour before food.

The number of cycles will depend upon how well the treatment is controlling or improving your symptoms and how well you are tolerating the treatment.

You will have a routine blood test and medical review before the start of each cycle of treatment. This is so your team can monitor and manage any side effects as well as assess your response to 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.

- If you are taking any other medicines for any other condition(s): Some medicines may interact with your treatment, therefore it's important to keep your medical team up to date about any other changes to these medicine(s).

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

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.



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.

Common side effects (more than 1 in 10)

• 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.

• Low platelets

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)

Nausea and vomiting may occur during treatment, the severity of this varies from person to person. Anti-sickness medication will 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 The Christie, because your anti-sickness medication may need to be changed or increased.

• Diarrhoea

If this becomes a problem while you are having treatment, anti-diarrhoea tablets can be bought from a pharmacy or prescribed by your GP for a temporary period until this is resolved. If the problem persists contact The Christie. Ask the staff for a copy of 'Eating: help yourself' which has some useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

• Sore mouth and altered taste

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 have a strange taste (metallic or bitter). A strongly flavoured sweet or mint will help to disguise this. Normal taste will usually return after the treatment finishes.

• 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, contact **0161 446 8100** or email **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 provides 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.

- **Lethargy**

Chemotherapy can make you feel tired and lacking in energy, although this is not usually severe. It can be frustrating when you feel unable to cope with routine tasks. If you do feel tired, rest and get help with household chores. If necessary, take time off work. Gentle exercise e.g. walking can be beneficial.

Uncommon side effects (less 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.

- **Gastro-intestinal upset**

This treatment can sometimes cause indigestion, abdominal pain or diarrhoea. Let your doctor know if you have any of these symptoms. If you have abdominal pain with nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea, contact The Christie Hotline without delay.

- **Skin rashes**

Some people can get a rash when receiving oral Etoposide. The rash may be itchy and need treatment with antihistamines and/or steroid creams. If it is very troublesome, the oral Etoposide may need to be stopped temporarily and restarted at a lower dose. Your skin may also appear darker in colour or lightly tanned, especially around the joints. This is known as hyperpigmentation. This should return to normal once your treatment has finished.

Rare side effects (less than 1 in 100)

- **Tingling and numbness in the fingers or toes/muscle weakness**

This is usually only mild and temporary. It can sometimes last for some time or become permanent. Sometimes you may also have difficulty controlling the muscles in your arms and legs or your balance. Please report these symptoms to your doctor on your next hospital visit.

- **Second cancers**

Rarely acute leukaemia can occur with this chemotherapy when it is given with other chemotherapy drugs. Speak to your doctor if you wish to discuss this further.

- **Tumour Lysis Syndrome**

Although this is rare with Etoposide capsules, this treatment may cause the rapid breakdown of cells which may lead to abnormalities in the blood. This problem is more likely if you have a lot of disease or if your kidneys do not work as well as they should do. Your doctor will tell you if you are at risk. You may be given a kidney-protective medicine called allopurinol for the first cycle of treatment, and your doctor may do additional blood tests to monitor this side effect. We sometimes admit patients for the first treatment to give intravenous fluids and kidney-protective medication and twice daily monitoring of blood tests for 48 hours.

- **Heart problems (Warning!)**

Rarely etoposide can cause chest pain (angina) or a heart attack. If you experience chest pain you should ring **999** or go immediately to your nearest Accident and Emergency department.

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:

Neuro-oncology clinical nurse specialist - **0161 446 8441**

Your consultant's secretary: Dr McBain - **0161 918 7008**

Dr Borst/Dr Milanovic - **0161 446 3362**

Dr Colaco/Dr Whitfield/Dr Kennedy - **0161 918 7197**

For urgent advice and support 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 or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



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urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week