

## Gemcitabine and capecitabine

The possible benefits of treatment vary; for some people this treatment with 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 with gemcitabine and capecitabine. Gemcitabine is given intravenously (through a drip in the arm) and capecitabine is a tablet taken twice a day (please see directions below). It is given for 3 weeks, followed by a 1 week rest. This 4 weeks is called a 'cycle'.

Your treatment will be given for ..... cycles.

The treatment is given as follows:

**Day 1, day 8 and day 15 (weeks 1 to 3)** Gemcitabine as a drip over 30 minutes, and  
**Day 1 to day 21 (weeks 1 to 3)** Capecitabine tablets taken morning and evening.  
**Days 22 to 28 (week 4)** Rest week. No treatment.

Capecitabine are chemotherapy tablets. These come in two strengths: 150mg and 500mg tablets. Your dose is calculated according to your height and weight. You may have to take several tablets of each strength to make up the dose. Your tablets will be supplied from The Christie Pharmacy clearly labelled with directions on how many tablets you need to take.

1. Take the tablets twice a day (morning and evening) 10 to 12 hours apart.
2. Take the tablets every day for 21 days (including Saturday and Sunday).
3. This is followed by 7 days rest when you do not take the tablets.
4. Take the tablets within 30 minutes after food (breakfast or evening meal). It does not have to be a large meal. It can be a snack such as a sandwich or biscuits.
5. Take the tablets with water only. Some fruit juice can react with your medication.
6. Store your tablets in a cool, dry place, away from the reach of children.
7. **If you miss a dose, do not double up the next dose. Take your regular dose at the next scheduled time. Bring back any left over tablets to the clinic.**

Capecitabine will interact with warfarin (a blood thinning tablet). Tell your doctor if you are taking warfarin so that a different blood thinning agent may be prescribed. Capecitabine also interacts with phenytoin, allopurinol and other medicines. Tell your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you are taking these drugs.

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.**

## 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.

You will have a routine blood test before each treatment, to monitor the effects of the chemotherapy. Occasionally we may not be able to go ahead with your treatment until your blood cells are back to a safe level. In this case your chemotherapy will usually be put back a week.

### • 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.

### • Flu-like symptoms and headaches

Some chemotherapy may cause flu-like symptoms such as fever, aches and pains and shivering about 3 to 5 hours after it is given. 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.

### • Sore hands and feet (PPE) (plantar-palmar erythema)

The skin on your hands and feet may become very dry, red and sore with some cracking. Nails can become brittle and ridged. Moisturising cream applied to hands and feet can help with this. Please contact The Christie Hotline if your hands and feet continue to be sore, as your chemotherapy dose may need to change.

### • Increased sensitivity to the sun

Your skin will tan or burn in the sun more easily. Sit in the shade, avoid too much sun and use a sunblock cream and wear a hat.

### • Watery eyes

We can give you eye drops for this, but it will improve in time. Your eyes may also water. Often this will

improve with time and needs no specific treatment. If you have ongoing symptoms, please discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

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

### • Mild nausea and vomiting (sickness)

You may have mild nausea and vomiting. You may be given anti-sickness tablets to take at home. If you continue to feel or be sick, contact your GP or this hospital, your anti-sickness medication may be changed or increased.

### • Hair thinning

Some hair loss may occur during treatment although this is unlikely. It is advisable to avoid perms, colours, use of hot brushes and vigorous, frequent washing that could increase hair loss. Please remember that this is a temporary side effect and your hair will grow back when your treatment is completed. Very rarely, hair loss may 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 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](mailto:manchester@maggiescentres.org).

### • Diarrhoea (Warning!)

Diarrhoea may be a side effect of your treatment. If you have watery diarrhoea you should immediately take the anti-diarrhoea treatment that the doctor has prescribed for you. This is called loperamide, and it will be dispensed by The Christie Pharmacy.

#### Follow the doctor's instructions exactly:

Take 2 loperamide capsules as soon as the first liquid stool occurs. Then take one capsule with each liquid loose stool. (Maximum loperamide daily dose is 8 capsules). If you continue to have more than 4 bowel movements a day (compared to pre-treatment) or bowel movements during the night, please ring The Christie Hotline for advice.

### • Skin rash

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

### • Fluid retention

Your feet/legs may become swollen on gemcitabine 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.

### • 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.

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

- **Blood clots (Warning!)**

During chemotherapy you are more at risk of developing 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.

- **Chest pain or stroke (Warning!)**

A small number of patients receiving capecitabine can experience chest pain (angina) or rarely have a heart attack. Extremely rarely this may lead to death. Other complications such as stroke or mini-stroke can happen but are exceptionally rare.

If you develop any of these symptoms you should contact your hospital doctor for advice. In an emergency you should go immediately to your nearest accident and emergency department.

- ~~• **Severe skin reaction (Warning!)**~~

~~Very rarely you may develop a severe skin reaction. If you experience tender red skin patches which subsequently blister please seek urgent medical advice. The skin changes may be preceded by fever, chest symptoms and photophobia (a need to squint or close your eyes, which is worse in bright light). These symptoms may be caused by conditions called Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis (TEN) and Stevens Johnson Syndrome (SJS).~~

- **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. Stopping the chemotherapy and taking steroids will help.

- **Herbal medicine**

Some herbal medicine including St John's Wort can affect the chemotherapy. You should let your doctor know if you are taking any herbal medication, complementary or alternative medicines, including vitamins, minerals and medicines purchased over the counter.

## 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

Some side effects may become evident only after a long time. 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.

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## 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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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