

Carboplatin and weekly paclitaxel (Taxol) (for anal cancer)

The possible benefits of treatment vary; for some people 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 'SACT, a guide' which gives general information on systemic anti-cancer treatment and side effects.

Your treatment

Your doctor or nurse clinician has prescribed for you a course of treatment, which includes the chemotherapy paclitaxel (Taxol) and carboplatin. The chemotherapy is given into a vein via a drip. The treatment consists of the following:

Day 1 - Paclitaxel and carboplatin (both over 60 mins)

Days 8 and 15 - Paclitaxel only (over 60 mins)

Treatment is repeated every 28 days for a total of 6 cycles.

Paclitaxel can cause an allergic reaction, otherwise known as a hypersensitivity reaction. These are relatively uncommon but do occur, although full-blown anaphylaxis, where someone collapses and needs adrenaline (like an EpiPen), is extremely rare. To prevent this from happening, we will give you pre-medication injections and tablets 30 minutes before starting the paclitaxel treatment. You will have a routine blood test before the start of each treatment (days 1, 8 and 15). 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.

Kidney function It is important to monitor how your kidneys are working while you are having treatment. We can do this by checking your blood results or we may ask you to attend for a GFR test.

After Cycle 2 of treatment, if clinically possible you will have your treatment at a location closer to home. The Christie is committed to providing treatment closer to home as part of the Outreach and Christie at Home service.

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.

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.

Allergic reactions

A small number of patients can have an allergic reaction to paclitaxel or carboplatin. Reactions can include breathlessness, a feeling of dizziness, skin rashes, itching, a high temperature, shivering, redness of the face, headache, anxiety, and a desire to pass urine. You will be monitored throughout your treatment for any signs of an allergic reaction but it is important to tell your nurse or doctor if you have any of these signs, or feel unwell in any way.

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)

• 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.

• 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.

• 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.

- **Hair loss**

You will usually lose all of your hair. The hair falls out gradually 10 to 14 days following your first course of treatment. Body and facial hair can also fall out. 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 complete. 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 8439** 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.

It may be possible for you to have scalp cooling to reduce hair loss caused by this chemotherapy. Ask your doctor or nurse 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 to 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** or email **manchester@maggiescentres.org**.

- **Tingling and numbness in the fingers or toes**

This is due to the effect of paclitaxel on the nerves and is known as peripheral neuropathy. You may also notice that you have difficulty doing up buttons or similar tasks. Tell your doctor if you notice any numbness or tingling in your hands or feet. This usually improves a few months after treatment has finished although this may be permanent.

- **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.

- **Muscle and joint pains**

Sometimes you may experience pain in the muscles in your legs. A simple painkiller will help. Ask your doctor for advice on this.

- **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 SACT booklet. If you continue to have a sore mouth, please contact The Christie Hotline.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

- **Diarrhoea**

If this becomes a problem while you are having treatment, loperamide anti-diarrhoea capsules 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. If you develop severe diarrhoea it is important to contact The Christie straightaway as this may be a sign of a serious infection.

- **Constipation**

Try to drink plenty of fluids. Report this to your hospital doctor or nurse who can advise you regarding diet and who may prescribe a suitable laxative. Ask the staff for a copy of The Christie booklet 'Eating - help yourself' which has useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

- **Nail changes**

You may see nail changes and discolouration of your nail bed.

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 straight away. Paclitaxel can cause pain where the injection is given, or along the vein. If you feel pain, tell your doctor or nurse as they can slow the drip to reduce the reaction.

- **Low blood pressure**

Your blood pressure will be checked during your treatment. Let the doctor know if you feel faint or dizzy.

- **Changes in heart rate**

Paclitaxel can sometimes cause a temporary slowing of the heart rate known as bradycardia. This usually does not cause any harm.

- **Abdominal pain**

This may start a few days after finishing chemotherapy and may last for a few days. Please contact The Christie if this happens. Your doctor can prescribe painkillers if appropriate.

- **Tinnitus and high frequency hearing loss**

You may develop tinnitus (ringing in the ears). This sensation should subside when your treatment finishes. High frequency hearing loss can occur with this chemotherapy. In rare cases this may be permanent.

Seriously and potentially life threatening side effects

In a small number 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.

- **Blood clots**

During chemotherapy you are more at risk of 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 (around 2 to 3 litres per day). Symptoms of a blood clot include; breathlessness, chest pain, fainting, coughing up blood or pain, redness, swelling or warmth in an arm or leg. If you develop any of these symptoms you should ring **999** or go immediately to your nearest A&E department.

Other medicines

Some medicines can be harmful to take when you are having chemotherapy. Let your doctor know about any medications you are taking, including non-prescribed medicines such as complementary therapies and herbal remedies.

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.

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.

Loss of periods

This is more likely in women over the age of 40 when most women will notice some change in their periods. It is less common in women under the age of 40 but does still happen and can result in significant menopausal symptoms (see section below). Even if your periods stop completely during chemotherapy your periods may come back several years later. This means that you may be able to become pregnant even many years after chemotherapy. It is very important to use contraception if you don't want to get pregnant.

Menopausal symptoms

When the ovaries stop working due to chemotherapy or during a natural menopause most women experience symptoms such as hot flushes, sweats (night and day) and vaginal dryness. These hormonal changes can make the vagina feel as though it has shrunk and become less easy to stretch. This is called vaginal atrophy and can result in discomfort, pain on sexual intercourse, itching and recurrent urine infections. If your ovaries don't start to work again the vaginal symptoms can be permanent, although the flushes and sweats tend to reduce and stop over a small number of years. Some women who have already gone through menopause may notice their symptoms worsening for a time after chemotherapy.

The vaginal symptoms can start early and the longer they are left the harder they can be to treat. Please contact your specialist nurse either in clinic or by phone when the symptoms first develop if you would like help. Symptoms can be managed in several ways including gels, essential oil pessaries and sometimes local oestrogen replacement.

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:

Administration enquiries - **0161 918 7606/7610**

Chemotherapy nurse - **0161 918 7171**

Clinical trials unit - **0161 918 7663**

For urgent 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:

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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