

Gemcitabine and carboplatin (Breast)

The possible benefits of this 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 'Chemotherapy, a guide' which gives general information on chemotherapy and side effects.

Your treatment

Your doctor has prescribed for you a treatment which includes the chemotherapy gemcitabine and carboplatin

Day 1: Gemcitabine is given via a drip over 30 minutes followed by Carboplatin via a drip over 1 hour

Day 8: Gemcitabine via a drip over 30 minutes

The treatment is given for cycles.

You will have a routine blood test 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 the chemotherapy may be delayed a week or omitted.

You may be advised to have a line fitted to aid the delivery of your intravenous chemotherapy treatment. This will be organised by the clinic if it is required. **Your line needs to be removed** after all your intravenous chemotherapy treatments have finished. If you have not received an appointment for this please contact the procedure team on **0161 446 3916**.

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.

Kidney function

It is important to monitor how your kidneys are working while you are having treatment. We will do this through routine blood tests, or a GFR test (the most accurate test of kidney function). It is important to drink plenty of fluids the day before and for a few days after chemotherapy.



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.

- **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.

- **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 (Warning!)**

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 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 hotline, because your anti-sickness medication may need to be changed or increased.

Common side effects (more than 1 in 10)

- **Breathlessness**

Gemcitabine can cause temporary narrowing of the airways, which can cause breathlessness. Let your hospital doctor know if you feel breathless.

- **Nausea and vomiting (sickness)**

Nausea and vomiting are commonly associated with chemotherapy but 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.

- **For female patients only**

Loss of periods

Due to the effect of chemotherapy on the ovaries, you may find that your periods become irregular or stop. 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, pessaries and sometimes local oestrogen replacement. You may also find it helpful to request the booklet 'Menopausal symptoms and breast cancer' by Breast Cancer Care (either from your breast care nurse, the cancer information centre at The Christie or online).

• 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. Asian and African-Caribbean people may develop noticeable light patches on their skin.

• Changes to nails

Your nails may become brittle and their texture or colour may change. These changes grow out over a few months once the treatment has finished. Pain at the nail bed (at the base of the nail) may occur, but is rare. Acrylic nails are not recommended.

• Heartburn

Chemotherapy treatment can cause indigestion or reflux. If you experience this please contact The Christie Hotline. Heartburn can be treated with medication from your GP.

• Strange taste

Chemotherapy can often leave a strange, metallic taste in your mouth. It can also make food seem tasteless and bland. Normal taste will usually come back after the treatment finishes. Ask the staff for dietary booklets which you may find helpful.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

• Skin rash

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

• Hair thinning

Some hair loss may occur during treatment, including body and facial hair. 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. If you would like an appointment with the wig service, this can be arranged for you by visiting the cancer information centre. It is a good idea to get your wig before you lose a lot of hair which you can then match to your natural colour. Ask the staff for a copy of the 'Wig fitting service at The Christie'.

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.

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

This is uncommon and it is usually only mild and temporary. On rare occasions, this may be permanent. You should report these symptoms to your doctor on your next hospital visit.

- **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, contact The Christie Hotline.

- **Lethargy**

Chemotherapy often makes you feel tired and lacking in energy. It can be frustrating when you feel unable to cope with routine tasks. You may benefit from additional support during your treatment. Complementary therapies may be helpful. Ask your nurse or doctor for further information. 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.

- **Diarrhoea (Warning!)**

If this becomes a problem at any point during your treatment, contact The Christie Hotline for advice. **If you develop severe diarrhoea it is important to contact The Christie on 0161 446 3658 as this may be a sign of a serious infection. Don't delay!**

- **Constipation**

Try to drink plenty of fluids and eat foods high in fibre. Tell your doctor who may prescribe a suitable laxative. Ask the staff for a copy of 'Eating: help yourself' which has useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

- **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 also occur with this chemotherapy, this may be permanent.

- **Fluid retention**

The chemotherapy can cause fluid retention, so that your hands and feet become swollen. This will be temporary but should you experience this contact your hospital doctor or nurse.

Rare side effects (less than 1 in 100)

- **Pulmonary toxicity**

Very rarely, this type of chemotherapy can make your breathing worse (this is usually temporary) or cause inflammation of the lungs which may need treatment. If you notice persistent and worsening shortness of breath, please tell your doctor or nurse straight away.

- **Blood clots (Warning!)**

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

- **Infiltration**

Infiltration 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.

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 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.

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:

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.

© 2020 The Christie NHS Foundation Trust. This document may be copied for use within the NHS only on the condition that The Christie NHS Foundation Trust is acknowledged as the creator.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. 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

