Rituximab (Rituxan®)

Pronounced: ri-TUX-i-mab
Classification: Monoclonal Antibody

About Rituximab

Rituximab is a synthetic (man made) antibody directed against a protein called CD20, found on the surface of normal and cancerous B-cells, which are part of the immune system. More than 95% of B-cell non-hodgkin's lymphomas (NHLs) express the CD20 target, making rituximab an affective therapy for these NHLs.

An antibody is a part of the immune system that "marks" things (such as germs, bacteria and, in this case, cancer cells) to be destroyed by the immune system. Once rituxan attaches itself to the B cells expressing CD20, it summons the body's immune system to attack and destroy those cells.

How to Take Rituximab

Rituximab is given by intravenous (into a vein) infusion. It may take several hours or longer to receive your first dose of rituximab. Depending on how you tolerate the medication, you may receive subsequent doses more quickly. The dosage and schedule is determined by the person's body size, type of cancer, and treatment regimen.

You should not receive rituxan if you have an active infection or receive a vaccine containing a live virus while on therapy (including oral polio, smallpox, MMR, nasal flu, and chickenpox vaccines).

Possible Side Effects of Rituximab

There are a number of things you can do to manage the side effects of Rituximab. Talk to your doctor or nurse about these recommendations. They can help you decide what will work best for you. These are some of the most common side effects:

Infusion and Allergic Reactions

Allergic or infusion reactions may occur during the treatment, typically within 30 minutes to 2 hours of beginning the first infusion. This is less common after the first treatment. You will be given diphenhydramine (Benadryl®) and acetaminophen (Tylenol®) before your treatment to reduce the chance of a reaction. During the infusion, if you experience difficulty breathing or swallowing, experience chest pain, cough or wheezing, swelling of lips or face, develop itching, rash or hives, lightheadedness, fever, chills, or shakes inform your nurse immediately. Additional medications may be given to alleviate your discomfort.

Your infusion may be slowed or temporarily stopped.

Low White Blood Cell Count(Leukopenia or Neutropenia)

White blood cells (WBC) are important for fighting infection. While receiving treatment, your WBC count can drop, putting you at a higher risk of getting an infection. You should let your doctor or nurse know right away if you have a fever (temperature greater than 100.4°), sore throat or cold, shortness of breath, cough, burning with urination, or a sore that doesn't heal.

Tips to preventing infection:

- Washing hands, both yours and your visitors, is the best way to prevent the spread of infection.
- Avoid large crowds and people who are sick (i.e.: those who have a cold, fever or cough or live with someone with these symptoms).
- When working in your yard, wear protective clothing including long pants and gloves.
- Do not handle pet waste.
- Keep all cuts or scratches clean.
- Shower or bath daily and perform frequent mouth care.
- Do not cut cuticles or ingrown nails. You may wear nail polish, but not fake nails.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before scheduling dental appointments or procedures.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before you, or someone you live with, has any vaccinations.

For more suggestions, read the Neutropenia Tip Sheet.

Nausea and/or Vomiting

Take anti-nausea medications as prescribed. If you continue to have nausea or vomiting, notify your doctor or nurse so they can help you manage this side effect. In addition, dietary changes may help. Avoid things that may worsen the symptoms, such as heavy or greasy/fatty, spicy or acidic foods (lemons, tomatoes, oranges). Try antacids, (e.g. milk of magnesia, calcium tablets such as Tums), saltines, or ginger ale to lessen symptoms. Read the Nausea & Vomiting Tip Sheet for more suggestions.

Call your doctor or nurse if you are unable to keep fluids down for more than 12 hours or if you feel lightheaded or dizzy at any time.

Fatigue

While on cancer treatment you may need to adjust your schedule to manage fatigue. Plan times to rest during the day and conserve energy for more important activities. Exercise can help combat fatigue; a simple daily walk with a friend can help. Talk to your healthcare team and see OncoLink's section on fatigue for helpful tips on dealing with this side effect.

Flu-Like Symptoms

You may experience flu-like symptoms, including muscle and body aches, headache, fever and chills. Acetaminophen may help relieve these symptoms. However, fever can be

a sign of an infection and should be reported to your healthcare provider.

Other Side Effects

Rare, but serious side effects include:

- Progressive Multifocal Leukoencephalopathy (PML) is a rare, serious brain infection caused by a virus. Report any of the following to your healthcare provider right away: confusion, loss of balance, difficulty walking or talking, weakness on one side of your body or any vision changes.
- Abnormal heart rhythm. Report any feelings of irregular heartbeats, chest pain or palpitations.
- Severe skin and mouth reactions have been reported. Notify your healthcare provider if you develop painful sores or blisters, on your skin, lips or inside your mouth, rash or peeling skin.
- Bowel perforation has also been reported. Notify your healthcare provider if you experience new or worsening abdominal pain, fever, vomiting or constipation for 3 days or more.

Ifosfamide (Ifex®)

Pronounced: eye-FOSS-fuh-MIDE
Classification: Alkylating Agent

About Ifosfamide

Ifosfamide exerts its anti-cancer affect by a process called alkylation. Alkylation damages the DNA of cells, which prevents them from dividing and causes them to die. Since cancer cells, in general, divide faster and with less error correcting than healthy cells, cancer cells are more sensitive to this damage.

How to Take Ifosfamide

Ifosfamide is given by intravenous (into a vein) infusion. The dosage and schedule is determined by the person's size and type of cancer. It can be given alone or with other drugs.

Possible Side Effects of Ifosfamide

There are a number of things you can do to manage the side effects of Ifosfamide. Talk to your doctor or nurse about these recommendations. They can help you decide what will work best for you. These are some of the most common side effects:

Low White Blood Cell Count (Leukopenia or Neutropenia)

White blood cells (WBC) are important for fighting infection. While receiving treatment, your WBC count can drop, putting you at a higher risk of getting an infection. You should let your doctor or nurse know right away if you have a fever (temperature greater than

100.4 F), sore throat or cold, shortness of breath, cough, burning with urination, or a sore that doesn't heal.

Tips to preventing infection:

- Washing hands, both yours and your visitors, is the best way to prevent the spread of infection.
- Avoid large crowds and people who are sick (i.e.: those who have a cold, fever or cough or live with someone with these symptoms).
- When working in your yard, wear protective clothing including long pants and gloves.
- Do not handle pet waste.
- Keep all cuts or scratches clean.
- Shower or bath daily and perform frequent mouth care.
- Do not cut cuticles or ingrown nails. You may wear nail polish, but not fake nails.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before scheduling dental appointments or procedures.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before you, or someone you live with, has any vaccinations.

For more suggestions, read the Neutropenia Tip Sheet.

Low Red Blood Cell Count (Anemia)

Your red blood cells are responsible for carrying oxygen to the tissues in your body. When the red cell count is low, you may feel tired or weak. You should let your doctor or nurse know if you experience any shortness of breath, difficulty breathing or pain in your chest. If the count gets too low, you may receive a blood transfusion. Read the anemia tip sheet for more information.

Low Platelet Count (Thrombocytopenia)

Platelets help your blood clot, so when the count is low you are at a higher risk of bleeding. Let your doctor or nurse know if you have any excess bruising or bleeding, including nosebleeds, bleeding gums or blood in your urine or stool. If your platelet count becomes too low, you may receive a transfusion of platelets.

- Do not use a razor to shave (an electric razor is fine).
- Avoid contact sports and activities that can result in injury or bleeding.
- Do not take aspirin (salicylic acid), non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs) such as Motrin®, Aleve®, Advil®, etc. as these can all increase the risk of bleeding. Unless your healthcare team tells you otherwise, you may take acetaminophen (Tylenol).
- Do not floss or use toothpicks and use a soft-bristle toothbrush to brush your teeth.

Read the thrombocytopenia tip sheet for more information.

Nausea and/or Vomiting

Take anti-nausea medications as prescribed. If you continue to have nausea or vomiting, notify your doctor or nurse so they can help you manage this side effect. In addition, dietary changes may help. Avoid things that may worsen the symptoms, such as heavy or greasy/fatty, spicy or acidic foods (lemons, tomatoes, oranges). Try antacids, (e.g. milk of magnesia, calcium tablets such as Tums), saltines, or ginger ale to lessen symptoms. Read the Nausea & Vomiting Tip Sheet for more suggestions.

Call your doctor or nurse if you are unable to keep fluids down for more than 12 hours or if you feel lightheaded or dizzy at any time.

Decrease in Appetite

Visit OncoLink's section on Nutrition for tips on dealing with this side effect. Ask your nurse about nutritional counseling services.

- Try to eat five or six small meals or snacks throughout the day, instead of 3 larger meals.
- If you are not eating enough, nutritional supplements may help.
- You may experience a metallic taste or dislike foods or beverages that you liked before receiving chemotherapy. These symptoms can last up to several months.
- Avoid any food that you think smells or tastes bad. If red meat is a problem, eat chicken, turkey, eggs, dairy products and fish without a strong smell.
- Flavor meat or fish by marinating it in sweet juices, sweet and sour sauce or dressings. Use seasonings like basil, oregano or rosemary. Bacon, ham and onion can also add flavor to vegetables.

Loss or Thinning of Scalp and Body Hair (Alopecia)

Your hair may become thin, brittle, or may fall out. This typically begins two to three weeks after treatment starts. This hair loss can be all body hair, including pubic, underarm, legs/arms, eyelashes, and nose hairs. The use of scarves, wigs, hats and hairpieces may help. Hair generally starts to regrow soon after treatment is completed. Remember your hair helps keep you warm in cold weather, so a hat is particularly important in cold weather or to protect you from the sun. Read more on alopecia.

Sexual and Reproductive Changes

This drug can affect your reproductive system, resulting in the menstrual cycle or sperm production becoming irregular or stopping permanently. Women may experience menopausal effects including hot flashes and vaginal dryness - read more about coping with vaginal dryness. In addition, the desire for sex may decrease during treatment.

Exposure of an unborn child to this medication could cause birth defects, so you should not become pregnant or father a child while on this medication. Effective birth control is necessary during treatment, even if your menstrual cycle stops or you believe your sperm is affected. You may want to consider sperm banking or egg harvesting if you may wish to have a child in the future. Discuss these options with your oncology team. See OncoLink's section on sexuality for helpful tips for dealing with these side effects.

Effect on Kidneys and Bladder

Ifosfamide can irritate the kidneys and damage the lining of the bladder, causing you to have blood in your urine. Intravenous fluids may be given with your treatment to flush the kidneys and bladder. A medication called Mesna may be given to protect the bladder. Drink 6-8 glasses of fluid a day. Urinate every 2-3 hours. Call your doctor or nurse if you have difficulty urinating or have blood in your urine.

Nervous System Toxicity

In rare cases, ifosfamide can be toxic to the nervous system. This can range from mild

confusion, drowsiness, hallucinations and personality changes to seizure and coma. Toxicity can develop immediately after treatment up to several days later. Your caregiver should be aware of this rare side effect and know to report any changes in your behavior to your healthcare team right away.

Secondary Malignancies

There is a small risk of developing leukemia or other type of blood cancer due to treatment with this medication.

Carboplatin (Paraplatin®)

Pronounced: car-boe-PLATT-in
Classification: Platinum Chemotherapies

About Carboplatin

Carboplatin is a heavy metal compound that inhibits synthesis of RNA, DNA, and protein in cells. All of these compounds are vital for cells to divide and grow. By preventing them from dividing, the medication can stop the cancer from growing.

How to Take Carboplatin

Carboplatin is given by intravenous (IV, into a vein) injection. The schedule and dosage is based on the person's size and the cancer type being treated. It can be given alone, or with other drugs.

Carboplatin can interact with certain medications including some antibiotics, diuretics and blood thinners. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about all medications and supplements you take.

You or anyone you live with should avoid having live (oral polio, measles, rotovirus, yellow fever) or live-attenuated vaccines while receiving this medication.

Possible Side Effects

There are a number of things you can do to manage the side effects of carboplatin. Talk to your doctor or nurse about these recommendations. They can help you decide what will work best for you. These are some of the most common side effects:

Nausea and/or Vomiting

Talk to your doctor or nurse so they can prescribe medications to help you manage nausea and vomiting. In addition, dietary changes may help. Avoid things that may worsen the symptoms, such as heavy or greasy/fatty, spicy or acidic foods (lemons, tomatoes, oranges). Try antacids, (e.g. milk of magnesia, calcium tablets such as Tums), saltines, or ginger ale to lessen symptoms.

Call your doctor or nurse if you are unable to keep fluids down for more than 12 hours or if you feel lightheaded or dizzy at any time.

Low White Blood Cell Count (Leukopenia or Neutropenia)

White blood cells (WBC) are important for fighting infection. While receiving treatment, your WBC count can drop, putting you at a higher risk of getting an infection. You should let your doctor or nurse know right away if you have a fever (temperature greater than 100.4), sore throat or cold, shortness of breath, cough, burning with urination, or a sore that doesn't heal.

Tips to preventing infection:

- Washing hands, both yours and your visitors, is the best way to prevent the spread of infection.
- Avoid large crowds and people who are sick (i.e.: those who have a cold, fever or cough or live with someone with these symptoms).
- When working in your yard, wear protective clothing including long pants and gloves.
- Do not handle pet waste.
- Keep all cuts or scratches clean.
- Shower or bath daily and perform frequent mouth care.
- Do not cut cuticles or ingrown nails. You may wear nail polish, but not fake nails.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before scheduling dental appointments or procedures.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before you, or someone you live with, has any vaccinations.

Low Red Blood Cell Count (Anemia)

Your red blood cells are responsible for carrying oxygen to the tissues in your body. When the red cell count is low, you may feel tired or weak. You should let your doctor or nurse know if you experience any shortness of breath, difficulty breathing or pain in your chest. If the count gets too low, you may receive a blood transfusion.

Low Platelet Count (Thrombocytopenia)

Platelets help your blood clot, so when the count is low you are at a higher risk of bleeding. Let your doctor or nurse know if you have any excess bruising or bleeding, including nose bleeds, bleeding gums or blood in your urine or stool. If the platelet count becomes too low, you may receive a transfusion of platelets.

- Do not use a razor (an electric razor is fine).
- Avoid contact sports and activities that can result in injury or bleeding.
- Do not take aspirin (salicylic acid), non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs) such as Motrin®, Aleve®, Advil®, etc. as these can all increase the risk of bleeding. Unless your healthcare team tells you otherwise, you may take acetaminophen (Tylenol).
- Do not floss or use toothpicks and use a soft-bristle toothbrush to brush your teeth.

Decrease in Appetite

Nutrition is an important part of your care. Cancer treatment can affect your appetite and, in some cases, the side effects of treatment can make eating difficult. Ask your nurse about nutritional counseling services at your treatment center to help with food choices.

- Try to eat five or six small meals or snacks throughout the day, instead of 3 larger meals.
- If you are not eating enough, nutritional supplements may help.
- You may experience a metallic taste or find that food has no taste at all. You may

dislike foods or beverages that you liked before receiving cancer treatment. These symptoms can last for several months or longer after treatment ends.
- Avoid any food that you think smells or tastes bad. If red meat is a problem, eat chicken, turkey, eggs, dairy products and fish without a strong smell. Sometimes cold food has less of an odor.

Allergic Reactions

In some cases, patients can have an allergic reaction to this medication. Signs of a reaction can include: rash, itching, hives, flushing, and/or shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. If you notice any changes in how you feel during the infusion, let your nurse know immediately. The infusion will be slowed or stopped if this occurs. Depending on the severity of your reaction, you may still be able to receive the medication with a pre-medication to prevent a reaction, or if the medication is given at a slower rate.

Fatigue

Fatigue is very common during cancer treatment and is an overwhelming feeling of exhaustion that is not usually relieved by rest. While on cancer treatment, and for a period after, you may need to adjust your schedule to manage fatigue. Plan times to rest during the day and conserve energy for more important activities. Exercise can help combat fatigue; a simple daily walk with a friend can help. Talk to your healthcare team for helpful tips on dealing with this side effect.

Loss or Thinning of Scalp and Body Hair (Alopecia)

Your hair may become thin, brittle, or may fall out. This typically begins two to three weeks after treatment starts. This hair loss can be all body hair, including pubic, underarm, legs/arms, eyelashes, and nose hairs. The use of scarves, wigs, hats and hairpieces may help. Hair generally starts to regrow soon after treatment is completed. Remember your hair helps keep you warm in cold weather, so a hat is particularly important in cold weather or to protect you from the sun.

Peripheral Neuropathy (Numbness or Tingling in the Hands and/or Feet)

Peripheral neuropathy is a toxicity that affects the nerves. It causes a numbness or tingling feeling in the hands and feet, often in the pattern of a stocking or glove. This can get progressively worse with additional doses of the medication. In some people, the symptoms slowly resolve after the medication is stopped, but for some it never goes away completely. You should let your healthcare provider know if you experience numbness or tingling in the hands and feet, as they may need to adjust the doses of your medication.

Mouth Sores

Certain cancer treatments can cause sores or soreness in your mouth and/or throat. Notify your doctor or nurse if your mouth, tongue, inside of your cheek or throat becomes white, ulcerated or painful. Performing regular mouth care can help prevent or manage mouth sores. If mouth sores become painful, your doctor or nurse can recommend a pain reliever.

- Brush with a soft-bristle toothbrush or cotton swab twice a day.
- Avoid mouthwashes that contain alcohol. A baking soda and/or salt warm water mouth rinse (2 level teaspoons of baking soda or 1 level teaspoon salt in an eight

ounce glass of warm water) is recommended 4 times daily.
- If your mouth becomes dry, eat moist foods, drink plenty of fluids (6-8 glasses), and suck on sugarless hard candy.
- Avoid smoking and chewing tobacco, drinking alcoholic beverages and citrus juices.

Diarrhea

Your oncology team can recommend medications to relieve diarrhea. Also, try eating low-fiber, bland foods, such as white rice and boiled or baked chicken. Avoid raw fruits, vegetables, whole grain breads, cereals and seeds. Soluble fiber is found in some foods and absorbs fluid, which can help relieve diarrhea. Foods high in soluble fiber include: applesauce, bananas (ripe), canned fruit, orange sections, boiled potatoes, white rice, products made with white flour, oatmeal, cream of rice, cream of wheat, and farina. Drink 8-10 glasses on non-alcoholic, un-caffeinated fluid a day to prevent dehydration.

Liver Toxicity

This medication can cause liver toxicity, which your doctor may monitor for using blood tests called liver function tests. If you develop elevations in your liver function tests, your healthcare provider may need to lower your dose or stop the medication. Notify your healthcare provider if you notice yellowing of the skin or eyes, your urine appears dark or brown or pain in your abdomen, as these can be signs of liver toxicity.

Nail Changes

Your fingernails/toenails may become dark, brittle or fall off. They may develop ridges or markings on them. Keep your fingernails and toenails clean and dry. You may use nail polish, but do not wear fake nails. If any nails fall off, clean the nail bed well with soap and water and cover with a bandaid.

Secondary Malignancies

There is a very low risk of developing another type of cancer due to treatment with this medication, which can occur many years after treatment.

Electrolyte Changes

Carboplatin can cause changes in the levels of certain electrolytes in your blood, including sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium. Your healthcare team will monitor your electrolyte levels throughout treatment.

Kidney Problems

Carboplatin can impact your kidney function. Your healthcare team will monitor your kidney function throughout treatment. Intravenous fluids are given with the chemotherapy to flush your kidneys and increase your urine output. Try to drink at least 6-8 glasses of uncaffienated fluids a day. Call your doctor or nurse if you do not urinate for more than 12 hours.

Other Side Effects

In rare cases, this medication can cause temporary changes to hearing and vision. Contact your care team if you notice ringing in your ears, decrease in hearing, or changes in your vision.

Reproductive Concerns

Exposure of an unborn child to this medication could cause birth defects, so you should not become pregnant or father a child while on this medication. Effective birth control is necessary during treatment. Even if your menstrual cycle stops or you believe you are not producing sperm, you could still be fertile and conceive. You should consult with your healthcare team before breastfeeding while receiving this medication.

If you have questions or concerns about the medication that you have been prescribed, please contact your healthcare team. OncoLink is designed for educational purposes only and is not engaged in rendering medical advice or professional services. The information provided through OncoLink should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or a disease. It is not a substitute for professional care. If you have or suspect you may have a health problem, you should consult your health care provider.

Etoposide (Toposar®, VePesid®, Etopophos®,VP-16)

Pronounced: e-TOE-poe-side
Classification: Antineoplastic Agent

About Etoposide

Etoposide works by inhibiting DNA synthesis in cancer cells. Because DNA is essential for cells to grow and reproduce, etoposide slows or stops the growth of cancer cells in your body.

How to Take Etoposide

Etoposide is given by intravenous (IV, into a vein) infusion, over a short period or in a continuous infusion over 24 hours. It can also be given by mouth in the form of a capsule. The dosage and schedule is determined by the person's size, type of cancer, and mode of administration. It can be given alone or with other medications.

Even when carefully and correctly administered by trained personnel, this drug may cause feeling of burning and pain. There is a risk that this drug may leak out of the vein at the injection site, resulting in tissue damage. If the area of injection becomes red, swollen, or painful at any time during or after the injection, notify your doctor or nurse immediately. Do not apply anything to the site unless instructed by your doctor or nurse.

Possible Side Effects of Etoposide

There are a number of things you can do to manage the side effects of etoposide. Talk to your doctor or nurse about these recommendations. They can help you decide what will work best for you. These are some of the most common side effects:

Low White Blood Cell Count (Leukopenia or Neutropenia)

White blood cells (WBC) are important for fighting infection. While receiving treatment, your WBC count can drop, putting you at a higher risk of getting an infection. You should let your doctor or nurse know right away if you have a fever (temperature greater than 100.4), sore throat or cold, shortness of breath, cough, burning with urination, or a sore that doesn't heal.

Tips to preventing infection:

- Washing hands, both yours and your visitors, is the best way to prevent the spread of infection.
- Avoid large crowds and people who are sick (i.e.: those who have a cold, fever or cough or live with someone with these symptoms).
- When working in your yard, wear protective clothing including long pants and gloves.
- Do not handle pet waste.
- Keep all cuts or scratches clean.
- Shower or bath daily and perform frequent mouth care.
- Do not cut cuticles or ingrown nails. You may wear nail polish, but not fake nails.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before scheduling dental appointments or procedures.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before you, or someone you live with, has any vaccinations.

Low Red Blood Cell Count (Anemia)

Your red blood cells are responsible for carrying oxygen to the tissues in your body. When the red cell count is low, you may feel tired or weak. You should let your doctor or nurse know if you experience any shortness of breath, difficulty breathing or pain in your chest. If the count gets too low, you may receive a blood transfusion.

Low Platelet Count (Thrombocytopenia)

Platelets help your blood clot, so when the count is low you are at a higher risk of bleeding. Let your doctor or nurse know if you have any excess bruising or bleeding, including nose bleeds, bleeding gums or blood in your urine or stool. If the platelet count becomes too low, you may receive a transfusion of platelets.

- Do not use a razor (an electric razor is fine).
- Avoid contact sports and activities that can result in injury or bleeding.
- Do not take aspirin (salicylic acid), non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs) such as Motrin®, Aleve®, Advil®, etc. as these can all increase the risk of bleeding. Unless your healthcare team tells you otherwise, you may take acetaminophen (Tylenol).
- Do not floss or use toothpicks and use a soft-bristle toothbrush to brush your teeth.

Lowering of Blood Pressure

Blood pressure may drop while this medication is being infused. When receiving this medication through a vein, your nurse will be checking your blood pressure before and during the infusion. It may become necessary to stop the administration of this medication or slow down the infusion rate if your blood pressure drops.

Nausea and/or Vomiting

Talk to your doctor or nurse so they can prescribe medications to help you manage

nausea and vomiting. In addition, dietary changes may help. Avoid things that may worsen the symptoms, such as heavy or greasy/fatty, spicy or acidic foods (lemons, tomatoes, oranges). Try antacids, (e.g. milk of magnesia, calcium tablets such as Tums), saltines, or ginger ale to lessen symptoms.

Call your doctor or nurse if you are unable to keep fluids down for more than 12 hours or if you feel lightheaded or dizzy at any time.

Fatigue

Fatigue is very common during cancer treatment and is an overwhelming feeling of exhaustion that is not usually relieved by rest. While on cancer treatment, and for a period after, you may need to adjust your schedule to manage fatigue. Plan times to rest during the day and conserve energy for more important activities. Exercise can help combat fatigue; a simple daily walk with a friend can help. Talk to your healthcare team for helpful tips on dealing with this side effect.

Loss or Thinning of Scalp and Body Hair (Alopecia)

Your hair may become thin, brittle, or may fall out. This typically begins two to three weeks after treatment starts. This hair loss can be all body hair, including pubic, underarm, legs/arms, eyelashes, and nose hairs. The use of scarves, wigs, hats and hairpieces may help. Hair generally starts to regrow soon after treatment is completed. Remember your hair helps keep you warm in cold weather, so a hat is particularly important in cold weather or to protect you from the sun.

Decrease in Appetite

Nutrition is an important part of your care. Cancer treatment can affect your appetite and, in some cases, the side effects of treatment can make eating difficult. Ask your nurse about nutritional counseling services at your treatment center to help with food choices.

- Try to eat five or six small meals or snacks throughout the day, instead of 3 larger meals.
- If you are not eating enough, nutritional supplements may help.
- You may experience a metallic taste or find that food has no taste at all. You may dislike foods or beverages that you liked before receiving cancer treatment. These symptoms can last for several months or longer after treatment ends.
- Avoid any food that you think smells or tastes bad. If red meat is a problem, eat chicken, turkey, eggs, dairy products and fish without a strong smell. Sometimes cold food has less of an odor.
- Add extra flavor to meat or fish by marinating it in sweet juices, sweet and sour sauce or dressings. Use seasonings like basil, oregano or rosemary to add flavor. Bacon, ham and onion can add flavor to vegetables.

Allergic Reactions

Patients can have an allergic reaction to this medication. Signs of a reaction can include: chills, fever, increased heart rate, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, or a decrease in blood pressure. If you notice any changes in how you feel during the infusion, let your nurse know immediately. The infusion will be slowed or stopped if this occurs.

Mouth Ulcers (Sores)

Certain cancer treatments can cause sores or soreness in your mouth and/or throat. Notify your doctor or nurse if your mouth, tongue, inside of your cheek or throat becomes white, ulcerated or painful. Performing regular mouth care can help prevent or manage mouth sores. If mouth sores become painful, your doctor or nurse can recommend a pain reliever.

- Brush with a soft-bristle toothbrush or cotton swab twice a day.
- Avoid mouthwashes that contain alcohol. A baking soda and/or salt warm water mouth rinse (2 level teaspoons of baking soda or 1 level teaspoon salt in an eight ounce glass of warm water) is recommended 4 times daily.
- If your mouth becomes dry, eat moist foods, drink plenty of fluids (6-8 glasses), and suck on sugarless hard candy.
- Avoid smoking and chewing tobacco, drinking alcoholic beverages and citrus juices.

Radiation Recall

Radiation recall is when the administration of a medication causes a skin reaction that looks like a sunburn (redness, swelling, soreness, peeling skin) in areas where radiation was previously given. Notify your oncology team if you notice this side effect. Treatment can include topical steroid ointments and a delay in your next chemotherapy dose.

Secondary Malignancies

There is a very low risk of developing leukemia due to treatment with this medication, which can occur many years after treatment. This is most often associated with repeated treatments or high doses.

Sexual & Reproductive Concerns

This medication may affect your reproductive system, resulting in the menstrual cycle or sperm production becoming irregular or stopping permanently. Women may experience menopausal effects including hot flashes and vaginal dryness. In addition, the desire for sex may decrease during treatment.

Exposure of an unborn child to this medication could cause birth defects, so you should not become pregnant or father a child while on this medication. Effective birth control is necessary during treatment and for at least 6 months after treatment, even if your menstrual cycle stops or you believe you are not producing sperm. You may want to consider sperm banking or egg harvesting if you may wish to have a child in the future. Discuss these options with your oncology team. You should consult with your healthcare team before breastfeeding while receiving this medication.

If you have questions or concerns about the medication that you have been prescribed, please contact your healthcare team. OncoLink is designed for educational purposes only and is not engaged in rendering medical advice or professional services. The information provided through OncoLink should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or a disease. It is not a substitute for professional care. If you have or suspect you may have a health problem, you should consult your health care provider.