

Irinotecan (Camptosar®, CPT-11)

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Pronounced: EYE-ri-noe-TEE-kan

Classification: Topoisomerase inhibitor

About Irinotecan (Camptosar®, CPT-11)

Irinotecan is thought to work by blocking the action of an enzyme in cells called topoisomerase I. Cells need this enzyme to keep their DNA in the proper shape when they are dividing. Blocking this enzyme leads to breaks in the DNA, which leads to cell death.

How to Take Irinotecan

Irinotecan is given by intravenous (IV, into a vein) infusion. It is used in a variety of chemotherapy regimens. The actual dose and dosing schedule will depend on your treatment regimen, body size, and general health. You may receive anti-nausea medication and anti-diarrheal medication prior to the irinotecan infusion.

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

The blood levels of this medication can be affected by certain foods and medications, so they should be avoided for 1-2 weeks before treatment. These include: grapefruit, grapefruit juice, carbamazepine, ketoconazole, rifampin, phenytoin, phenobarbital, and St. John's wort, among others. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about all medications and supplements you take.

Possible Side Effects of Irinotecan

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

Diarrhea

Diarrhea is a common side effect of irinotecan and can be very dangerous because it can lead to serious dehydration. Diarrhea can be defined as an increase in the number of bowel movements you have in a day. Your healthcare team may administer a medication in the clinic if you develop diarrhea right away. Your healthcare provider will tell you how to take loperamide (an anti-diarrheal medication) at home, which you should start taking as soon as diarrhea develops. Diarrhea is a serious side effect that can lead to dehydration. Notify your healthcare team if diarrhea does not stop on this medication so they can help you better manage this side effect.

Runny nose, excess saliva, watery eyes, sweating and cramping can accompany diarrhea that occurs within the first day of receiving this medication. If any of these symptoms occur during the infusion, notify your nurse. Diarrhea can continue to occur for 10-12 days after the treatment. Diarrhea can be a serious side effect that can lead to dehydration. Notify your healthcare provider if you develop diarrhea.

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/38° C), 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 oncology care team before scheduling dental appointments or procedures.
- Ask your oncology care team 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 oncology care team 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 oncology care team 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/Advil (ibuprofen), Aleve (naproxen), Celebrex (celecoxib) etc. as these can all increase the risk of bleeding. Please consult with your healthcare team regarding use of these agents and all over the counter medications/supplements while on therapy.
- Do not floss or use toothpicks and use a soft-bristle toothbrush to brush your teeth.

Nausea and/or Vomiting

Talk to your oncology care team 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 saltines, or ginger ale to lessen symptoms.

Call your oncology care team 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 or Taste Changes

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 oncology care team 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.

Less common, but important side effects can include:

- **Lung Changes:** This medication may cause interstitial lung disease, which is a scarring and stiffening of the lung tissue. Call your healthcare provider right away if you have new or worsening shortness of breath, cough, wheezing, or difficulty breathing.
- **Kidney Problems:** This medication can cause kidney problems, usually secondary to dehydration as a result of diarrhea or vomiting. Your creatinine level may be increased, which your oncology care team may monitor for using blood tests. Notify your healthcare provider if you notice decreased urine output, blood in the urine, swelling in the ankles, or loss of appetite.
- **Allergic Reactions:** In some cases, patients can have an allergic reaction to this medication. Signs of a reaction can include: shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chest pain, rash, flushing or itching, 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.

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 and for 6 months after treatment has ended for women and for 3 months after treatment has ended for men. Even if your menstrual cycle stops or you believe you are not producing sperm, you could still be fertile and conceive. You should not breastfeed while receiving this medication or for one week after your last dose.

Carboplatin (Paraplatin®)

[Read more about our content writing process](#)

Pronounced: car-boe-PLATT-in

Classification: Platinum Chemotherapies

About Carboplatin (Paraplatin®)

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 are based on the person's size, kidney function, and the cancer type being treated. It can be given alone, or with other drugs.

Even when carefully and correctly administered by trained personnel, this drug may cause a feeling of burning and pain. There is a risk that this medication may leak out of the vein at the injection site, resulting in tissue damage that can be severe. If the area of injection becomes red, swollen, or painful at anytime during or after the injection, notify your care team immediately. Do

not apply anything to the site unless instructed by your care team.

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.

Possible Side Effects

There are a number of things you can do to manage the side effects of carboplatin. Talk to your care team about these recommendations. They can help you decide what will work best for you. These are some of the most common or important 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 or 38 °C), 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 oncology care team before scheduling dental appointments or procedures.
- Ask your oncology care team 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 oncology care team 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 oncology care team 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/Advil (ibuprofen), Aleve (naproxen), Celebrex (celecoxib) etc. as these can all increase the risk of bleeding. Please consult with your healthcare team regarding use of these agents and all over the counter medications/supplements while on therapy.
- Do not floss or use toothpicks and use a soft-bristle toothbrush to brush your teeth.

Nausea and/or Vomiting

Talk to your oncology care team 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 saltines, or ginger ale to lessen symptoms.

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

Electrolyte Changes

This medication can affect the normal levels of electrolytes (sodium, potassium, magnesium, calcium, etc.) in your body. Your levels will be monitored using blood tests. If your levels become too low, your care team may prescribe specific electrolytes to be given by IV or taken by mouth. Do not take any supplements without first consulting with your care team.

Liver Toxicity

This medication can cause liver toxicity, which you will be monitored 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.

Kidney Problems

Carboplatin can impact your kidney function. Your healthcare team will monitor your kidney function throughout treatment. Try to drink at least 6-8 glasses of uncaffeinated fluids a day. Call your doctor or nurse if you do not urinate for more than 12 hours.

Live Vaccines

You, or anyone you live with, should avoid having live or live-attenuated vaccines while receiving this medication. These include herpes zoster (Zostavax) for shingles prevention, oral polio, measles, nasal flu vaccine (FluMist®), rotavirus and yellow fever vaccines.

Less common, but important side effects can include:

- **Peripheral Neuropathy (Numbness or Tingling in the Hands and/or Feet):** [Peripheral neuropathy](#) is a toxicity that affects the nerves. It causes numbness or a tingling feeling in the hands and/or 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 the oncology care team know if you experience numbness or tingling in the hands and/or feet, as they may need to adjust the doses of your medication.
- **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.
- **Vision/Hearing Changes:** In rare cases, this medication can cause 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 not breastfeed while receiving this medication.

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 or have questions or concerns about the medication that you have been prescribed, you should consult your health care provider.