Procarbazine (Matulane®)

Pronounced: pro-CAR-buh-ZEEN

Classification: Alkylating Agent

About Procarbazine (Matulane®)

Procarbazine exerts its anti-cancer effect 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 Procarbazine

Procarbazine comes as a capsule, to be taken by mouth. Take the capsule whole, do not break, chew, or open the capsules. The dosage and schedule are determined by the person's size. If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If it is close to your next dose do not double your dose, rather skip the dose and resume your usual dosing schedule.

It is important to make sure you are taking the correct amount of medication every time. Before every dose, check that what you are taking matches what you have been prescribed.

Patients should avoid alcoholic beverages while taking procarbazine. The combination of alcohol and procarbazine can cause unpleasant side effects. Foods high in tyramine (wine, yogurt, ripe cheeses, and bananas) should also be avoided. Consuming foods high in tyramine while taking procarbazine can raise your blood pressure. Numerous medications including barbituates, antihistamines, narcotics, and phenothiazines can cause central nervous system depression and should be avoided. Make sure your provider is aware of all the medications, vitamins, and supplements you are taking. Patients should avoid smoking while taking procarbazine because there is an increased risk of developing lung cancer.

Storage and Handling

Store your medication in the original, labeled container at room temperature and in a dry location (unless otherwise directed by your healthcare provider or pharmacist). This medication should not be stored in a pillbox. Keep containers out of reach of children and pets.

If a caregiver prepares your dose for you, they should consider wearing gloves or pour the pills directly from their container into the cap, a small cup, or directly into your hand. They should avoid touching the pills. They should always wash their hands before and after giving you the medication. Pregnant or nursing women should not prepare the dose for you. Ask your oncology team where to return any unused medication for disposal. Do not flush down the toilet or throw it in the trash.

Where do I get this medication?

Procarbazine is available through select specialty pharmacies. Your oncology team will work with your prescription drug plan to identify an in-network specialty pharmacy for the distribution of this medication and shipment directly to your home.

Insurance Information

This medication may be covered under your prescription drug plan. Patient assistance may be available to qualifying individuals without prescription drug coverage. Co-pay cards, which reduce the patient co-pay responsibility for eligible commercially (non-government sponsored) insured patients, are also available. Your care team can help you find these
Possible Side Effects of Procarbazine

There are a number of things you can do to manage the side effects of procarbazine. 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 side effects:

**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.

**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 the 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.

**Mouth Ulcers (Mucositis)**

Certain cancer treatments can cause sores or soreness in your mouth and/or throat. Notify your oncology care team 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 with warm water mouth rinse (2 level teaspoons of baking soda or 1 level teaspoon of 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.

**Less common, but important side effects**

- **Secondary Malignancies:** There is a slight risk of developing leukemia or another type of cancer due to treatment with this medication. This is most often associated with repeated treatments or high doses. Patients should avoid smoking if they have received procarbazine. There is an increased risk of developing lung cancer after treatment with this medication and smoking can further increase the risk.
- **Central Neurotoxicity:** which can present as weakness, loss of balance or coordination, unsteadiness, dizziness, or drowsiness. Notify your healthcare provider right away if you experience any of these symptoms.
- **Allergic reaction:** 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. Inform your care team immediately if you have symptoms of an allergic reaction.
- **Diarrhea:** Your oncology care 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 of non-alcoholic, un-caffeinated fluid a day to prevent dehydration.
- **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.

**Sexual and Reproductive Changes**

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 should consult with your healthcare team before breastfeeding while receiving this medication.

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. 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.