Altretamine (Hexalen®, HMM)

Pronounced: ahl-TRETT-uh-meen

Classification: Alkylating Agent

About Altretamine (Hexalen®, HMM)

Altretamine 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 divide faster and with less error-correcting than healthy cells, they are more sensitive to this damage. Altretamine is also metabolized into formaldehyde, which is cytotoxic (fatal) to most cells.

How to Take Altretamine

This medication is given in capsule form. The capsules should not be open, broken or chewed. The dose will depend on your body size. The total daily dose should be given as 4 divided doses, taken after meals and at bedtime. If you are having trouble swallowing your medication you should contact your pharmacist or care provider. If you miss a dose you should take your dose as soon as you remember. If it is close to your next scheduled dose when you remember, skip the missed dose and take the next dose as scheduled.

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.

This medication can interact with certain other medications. Cimetidine (Tagamet) can affect how this medication is eliminated from the body. When taking MAO inhibitor anti-depressants, such as isocarboxazid, phenelzine, selegiline, and tranylcypromine, this medication can cause orthostatic hypotension. You should consult with your care provider before taking a multivitamin. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about all medications and supplements you take.

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 in the trash.

Where do I get this medication?

Certain cancer medications are only available through specialty pharmacies. If you need to get this medication through a specialty pharmacy, your provider will help you start this process. Where you can fill your prescriptions may also be influenced by your prescription drug coverage. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist for assistance in identifying where you can get this medication.

Insurance Information
This medication may be covered under your prescription drug plan. Patient assistance may be available to qualifying individuals depending upon prescription drug coverage. Co-pay cards, which reduce the patient co-pay responsibility for eligible commercially (non-government sponsored) insured patients, may also be available. Your care team can help you find these resources, if they are available.

**Possible Side Effects**

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

**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.

**Peripheral Neuropathy**

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 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.

**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.

**Less common, but important side effects can include:**

• **Neurotoxicity:** This medication can cause neurological (brain and nerve) effects including mood disorders, changes in consciousness, ataxia (difficulty walking), dizziness, and vertigo. Your healthcare team will perform regular neurologic examinations while you are taking this medication. If you notice any of these side effects, contact your care team.

• **Orthostatic Hypotension:** Orthostatic hypotension is a sudden drop in your blood pressure when you go from a lying down to a sitting position or a sitting position to a standing position. This medication can cause symptomatic orthostatic hypotension when taken with monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitor class antidepressants. Be sure to inform your healthcare team of all medications and supplements you are taking before starting this drug. Be careful when getting out of bed or when standing up. If you become dizzy or lightheaded contact your care team.

**Reproductive Concerns**

Exposure of an unborn child to this medication could cause birth defects, so you should not become pregnant while on this medication. Even if your menstrual cycle stops, you could still be fertile and conceive. You should consult with your healthcare team before breastfeeding while receiving this medication.

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