Azacitidine SubQ and IV Formulation (Vidaza®)

**Pronounced:** ay-za-SYE-ti-deen

**Classification:** DNA Demethylating Agent

**About Azacitidine SubQ and IV Formulation (Vidaza®)**

Azacitidine kills abnormal cells in the bone marrow by inhibiting a process called DNA methylation, which is essential for cell reproduction. Because the abnormal cells cannot divide and grow, they die.

**How to Take Azacitidine**

Azacitidine is given by subcutaneous (under the skin) injections or intravenously (IV, by vein). The dose you receive is based on your size and may be changed depending on the side effects you experience. How often you receive this medication will be determined by your care team.

**Possible Side Effects**

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

- **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.
**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.

**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 on non-alcoholic, un-caffeinated fluid a day to prevent dehydration.

**Injection Site and Skin Problems**

If you are receiving this medication via a subcutaneous injection, you may have redness and pain at the injection site. You may also have ecchymosis (bruising) and petechiae. Notify your care team if you encounter these issues.

**Constipation**

There are several things you can do to prevent or relieve constipation. Include fiber in your diet (fruits and vegetables), drink 8-10 glasses of non-alcoholic fluids a day, and keep active. A stool softener once or twice a day may prevent constipation. If you do not have a bowel movement for 2-3 days, you should contact your healthcare team for suggestions to relieve the constipation.

**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.

**Muscle or Joint Pain/Aches and Headache**

Your care team can recommend medications and other strategies to help relieve pain.

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

- **Liver Toxicity**: This medication can cause liver toxicity especially in a patient with a history of previous liver impairment. Your oncology care team may monitor for using blood tests called liver function tests. Notify your healthcare provider if you notice yellowing of the skin or eyes, your urine appears dark or brown, or you have pain in your abdomen, as these can be signs of liver toxicity.
- **Renal Toxicity**: This medication can cause kidney issues especially in a patient with a history of kidney impairment. If you notice decreased urine output, blood in the urine, swelling in the ankles, or loss of appetite you should contact your care team.
• **Tumor Lysis Syndrome:** If there are a large amount of tumor cells in your body prior to treatment, you are at risk for tumor lysis syndrome. This happens when the tumor cells die too quickly and their waste overwhelms the body. You may be given a medication (allopurinol) and IV fluids to help prevent this. If you experience nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or become lethargic (drowsy, sluggish), notify your oncology team right away. TLS can affect your kidney function. Your provider will monitor your kidney function with blood work. Notify your provider if you have little or no urine output.

**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. Female partners of male patients receiving azacitidine should not become pregnant. You should not breastfeed while receiving this medication or for one week after your last dose.

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