Ixabepilone (Ixempra®)

Pronounced: IX-ab-EP-i-lone

Classification: Epothilones, Antineoplastic Agent

About Ixabepilone (Ixempra®)

Ixabepilone is a member of a class of chemotherapy agents called epothilones. Microtubules are the "skeletons" of cells and must be broken down in order for a cell to divide or reproduce. Epothilones work by stabilizing microtubules, which prevents the cell from dividing or reproducing, ultimately leading to cell death.

How to Take Ixabepilone

Ixabepilone is given by intravenous infusion (IV) over 3 hours. The actual dose is based on your height and weight. You will receive medications (antihistamines) prior to the ixabepilone infusion to reduce the risk of a hypersensitivity reaction. Ixabepilone contains dehydrated alcohol, which may make you sleepy or affect your ability to drive after the infusion, so you should plan to have someone drive you home after treatment.

This medication can be given alone or in combination with capecitabine. You should not receive this medication along with capecitabine if your liver enzymes are elevated as this could cause serious side effects. The levels of your liver enzymes will be checked with a blood test prior to receiving ixabepilone with capecitabine.

Certain medications, including (but not limited to) verapamil, ketoconazole, rifampin, phenytoin, St. John’s wort, and phenobarbital, can interfere with this medication. Make sure your provider is aware of all the medications, vitamins, and supplements you are taking. Grapefruit juice can also increase concentrations of ixabepilone, and should be avoided.

Possible Side Effects of Ixabepilone

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

**Allergic (Hypersensitivity) 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, rash, and flushing. 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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 of non-alcoholic, un-caffeinated fluid a day to prevent dehydration.
**Muscle or Joint Pain/Aches**

Your healthcare provider can recommend medications and other strategies to help relieve pain.

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

- **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.

- **Heart Problems:** This medication can cause heart attack, chest pain, abnormal heart rhythms, heart failure, ECG changes and cardiomyopathy. These more often occur in patients with a prior history of heart disease. Notify your healthcare provider right away or go to the emergency room if you have chest pain, shortness of breath, feel abnormal heartbeats, feel dizzy or faint, have sudden weight gain or swelling in the ankles or legs.

- **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.

**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.

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