Ibrutinib (Imbruvica®)

**Pronounced:** i-BROO-th-nib

**Classification:** Kinase Inhibitor

**About Ibrutinib (Imbruvica®)**

Ibrutinib is a type of targeted therapy called a kinase inhibitor. A kinase is an enzyme that promotes cell growth. There are many types of kinases, which control different phases of cell growth. This medication interferes with the function of Bruton's tyrosine kinase (BTK), which is found in excess on cancerous B cells. By interfering with BTK, ibrutinib interferes with the growth of the cancerous B cells.

**How to take Ibrutinib**

Ibrutinib comes in a capsule or tablet form. It can be taken with or without food. Swallow the tablets or capsules whole with water; do not open, crush or chew them. If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember that day. However, if it is the next day, just take that day's dose at the scheduled time, do not take more than one dose to make up for a missed dose.

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.

The blood levels of this medication can be affected by certain foods and medications, so they should be avoided. These include: grapefruit, grapefruit juice, and Seville oranges (often used in marmalade), St. John's Wort, several cardiac medications and many anti-fungal and antibiotic medications. 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 ibrutinib. 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:

**Bruising/Bleeding**

Ibrutinib works as an antiplatelet medication similar to aspirin. The time it takes to heal from a cut may take longer than before taking ibrutinib. Additionally, you may notice more bruising as a result of taking ibrutinib. Let your care team know if you have any excess bruising or bleeding of any kind, including nose bleeds, bleeding gums, or blood in your urine or stool. In some cases, this medication can cause serious bleeding. Call your provider right away if you have bleeding that is not stopping. Inform your doctor of any medical procedures or dental procedures/cleanings because ibrutinib will need to be held for a period of time before and after the procedure. Taking anti-coagulant medications or anti-platelet agents can increase the risk of major bleeding so you should make sure your provider is aware of all medications that you are taking.

**Diarrhea**

Diarrhea can be a very serious side effect of this medication. Notify your oncology team if the number of bowel movements you have in a day increases by 6 or more. Talk with your oncology team about which over the counter medications you can take and how to take them, as this will often differ from the instructions on the box.

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.

**Infection and Low White Blood Cell Count (Leukopenia or Neutropenia)**

This medication can cause life-threatening infections, with or without a decrease in white blood cell counts.

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.

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 antacids, (e.g. milk of magnesia, calcium tablets such as Tums), saltines, or ginger ale to lessen symptoms.

Call your 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.

Muscle or Joint Pain/Aches
Your doctor or nurse can recommend medication and other strategies to relieve pain.

Peripheral Edema
Peripheral edema is swelling of the extremities caused by the retention of fluid. It can cause swelling of the hands, arms, legs, ankles, and feet. The swelling can become uncomfortable. Notify your oncology care team if you are experiencing any new or worsening swelling.

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.

Decrease in Appetite
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 nurse 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.

Rash
Some patients may develop a rash, scaly, itchy, or dry skin. Use an alcohol-free moisturizer on your skin and lips; avoid moisturizers with perfumes or scents. Your doctor or nurse can recommend a topical medication if itching is bothersome. If your
skin does crack or bleed, be sure to keep the area clean to avoid infection. Be sure to notify your healthcare provider of any rash that develops, as this can be a reaction. They can give you more tips on caring for your skin.

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

- **Heart Problems:** This medication can cause abnormal heartbeats or an abnormal heart rhythm called afibrillation (a-fib) or a-flutter. It can also lead to heart failure. Notify your healthcare provider right away if you feel abnormal heartbeats or if you feel dizzy or faint.
- **High Blood Pressure:** This medication can cause high blood pressure (hypertension). Patients should have their blood pressure checked regularly during therapy. Any hypertension should be treated appropriately.
- **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.
- **Infection:** In rare cases, this medication has caused serious infections including PML. Progressive Multifocal Leukoencephalopathy (PML) is a rare but very serious brain infection that has been reported with this medication. The signs of PML may develop over several weeks or months. They may include changes in mood or usual behavior, confusion, thinking problems, loss of memory, changes in vision, speech, or walking, and decreased strength or weakness on one side of the body. If you develop any of these signs, notify your oncology care team immediately.
- **Secondary Cancer:** A secondary cancer is one that develops as a result of cancer treatment for another cancer. This is quite rare, but you should be aware of the risk. In most cases, a secondary cancer related to chemotherapy is a blood cancer (leukemia, lymphoma). This can occur years after treatment. This is most often associated with repeated treatments or high doses. Your provider will monitor your labs closely. Consider having a complete blood count with differential checked annually by your healthcare provider if you received high risk therapies.
- **Secondary Skin Cancers:** There is a very low risk of developing non melanoma skin cancer due to treatment with this medication, which can occur many years after treatment. Because this medication has been associated with the development of skin cancers, it is important to practice sun safety. Avoid the sun between 10-2pm, when it is strongest. Wear sunscreen (at least SPF 15) everyday; wear sunglasses, a hat and long sleeves/pants to protect your skin and seek out shade whenever possible.

**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 1 month after treatment is completed. 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.

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.