

Cisplatin (Platinol®)

Pronounce: SIS-plat-in

Classification: Platinum Coordination Complex

About Cisplatin (Platinol®)

Cisplatin is a heavy metal compound that inhibits synthesis of RNA, DNA, and protein in cells. All of these compounds are vital for cells to divide and grow. By preventing them from dividing, the medication can stop cancer from growing.

How to Take Cisplatin

Cisplatin is given through intravenous (IV, into a vein) infusion. The dose and schedule are determined by your size and type of cancer. You will be given IV fluids prior to receiving cisplatin. It can be given alone or with other drugs.

Even when carefully and correctly administered by trained personnel, this drug may cause a feeling of burning and pain. There is a risk that this medication may leak out of the vein at the injection site, resulting in tissue damage that can be severe. If the area of injection becomes red, swollen, or painful at anytime during or after the injection, notify your care team right away. Do not apply anything to the site unless told to do so by your care team.

This medication can affect the blood levels of some anti-seizure medications. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about all medications and supplements you take.

Possible Side Effects

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

Kidney Problems

This medication can cause kidney problems, including an increased creatinine level, which your oncology care team will monitor for using blood tests. Notify your healthcare provider if you notice decreased urine output, blood in the urine, swelling in the ankles, or loss of appetite.

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 your 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.

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 bathe 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.

Hearing Problems

Cisplatin can cause hearing loss and ringing in the ears. Your hearing will be checked prior to you receiving cisplatin and as needed throughout treatment. Call your doctor or nurse if you have ringing in your ears or if you notice a decrease in your hearing.

Allergic Reactions

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. 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.

Important but Less Common Side Effects

- **Electrolyte Abnormalities:** This medication can affect the normal levels of electrolytes (potassium, magnesium, calcium, etc.) in your body. Your levels will be monitored using blood tests. If your levels become too low, your care team may prescribe specific electrolytes to be given by IV or taken by mouth. Do not take any supplements without first consulting with your care team.
- **Taste and Smell Changes:** 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. Ask your nurse about nutritional counseling services to help with food choices.
- **Vision Changes:** This medication can cause blurred vision and a change in color perception, especially with higher doses or increased frequency of doses. Report any vision changes to your healthcare team immediately.
- **Secondary Cancers:** 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.
- **Posterior Reversible Encephalopathy Syndrome (PRES):** In rare cases, this medication has caused a neurological disorder called posterior reversible encephalopathy syndrome (PRES), also called reversible posterior leukoencephalopathy (RPLS). Symptoms of PRES/RPLS include headache, seizure, lethargy, confusion, blindness, and other visual and neurological disturbances. Report any of these symptoms to your healthcare team immediately.

Reproductive Concerns

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.

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. For women, effective birth control is necessary during treatment and for at least 14 months after treatment, even if your menstrual cycle stops. For men, effective birth control is necessary during treatment and for at least 11 months after treatment, even if you believe you are not producing sperm. You should consult with your healthcare team before breastfeeding while receiving this medication.

Temozolomide (Temodar®) IV formulation

Pronounce: TEM-oh-ZOE-loe-mide

Classification: Alkylating Agent

About Temozolomide (Temodar®) IV formulation

Temozolomide kills cancer cells through 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 than healthy cells, cancer cells are more sensitive to this damage.

Temozolomide is similar to the drug dacarbazine (DTIC). Patients who have had allergic reactions to dacarbazine should not take temozolomide.

How to Take Temozolomide

Temozolomide comes in oral (by mouth) and intravenous (IV, into a vein) forms. The dose and how often you receive this medication depends on your body size and type of cancer. You will have lab work regularly to monitor your blood counts. This medication sheet reviews the IV form of temozolomide.

When taking temozolomide in conjunction with radiation, you will be given a medication to prevent a certain type of pneumonia called PCP.

Possible Side Effects of Temozolomide

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

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

Nausea may be helped by taking on an empty stomach and at bedtime. Talk to your doctor or nurse so they can prescribe medications to help you manage [nausea and vomiting](#), which you can take about 30 minutes prior to the dose. 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 doctor or nurse 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 for 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 bathe daily and perform frequent [mouth care](#).
- Do not cut cuticles or ingrown nails. You may wear nail polish, but not fake nails.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before scheduling dental appointments or procedures.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before you, or someone you live with has any vaccinations.

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.
- Do not floss or use toothpicks and use a soft-bristle toothbrush to brush your teeth.

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.

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](#).

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.

Muscle or Joint Pain/Aches and Headache

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

Rash

Some patients may develop a rash, scaly skin, or red itchy bumps. Use an alcohol-free moisturizer on your skin and lips; avoid moisturizers with perfumes or scents. Your oncology care team 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 oncology care team of any rash that develops, as this can be a reaction. They can give you more tips on [caring for your skin](#).

Convulsions

This medication can cause a convulsion, where your muscles contract involuntarily. Convulsions can happen on their own, or can happen with a seizure. If you or a loved one notice twitching or jerking of your arms and/or legs, pale or bluish skin, eye-rolling, foaming at the mouth, or loss of consciousness, call 911 right away.

Important but Less Common Side Effects

- **Liver Toxicity:** This medication can cause liver toxicity, which your doctor 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 pain in your abdomen, as these can be signs of liver toxicity.
- **Pneumonia:** A certain kind of pneumonia (lung infection), called pneumocystis pneumonia, can happen while taking this medication.
- **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.

Sexual & Reproductive Concerns

This medication may affect a man's ability to have children. You may want to consider sperm banking if you may wish to have a child in the future. Discuss these options with your oncology team.

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. For men, condoms are necessary during treatment and for at least 3 months after the last dose. For women, effective birth control is necessary during treatment and for at least 6 months after the last dose. Men should not donate sperm during treatment and for at least 3 months after the last dose. Even if your menstrual cycle stops or you believe you are not producing sperm, you could still be fertile and conceive. You should breastfeed while receiving this medication and for at least 1 week after the last dose.

Temozolomide (Temodar®), Oral Formulation

Pronounce: TEM-oh-ZOE-loe-mide

Classification: Alkylating Agent

About Temozolomide (Temodar®), Oral Formulation

Temozolomide kills cancer cells through 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 than healthy cells, cancer cells are more sensitive to this damage.

Temozolomide is similar to the drug dacarbazine (DTIC). Patients who have had allergic reactions to dacarbazine should not take temozolomide.

How to Take Temozolomide

Temozolomide comes in oral (by mouth) and intravenous (IV, into a vein) forms. The dose and how often you receive this medication depends on your body size and type of cancer. You will have lab work regularly to monitor your blood counts.

In its oral form, temozolomide comes in a capsule. It should be taken on an empty stomach (1 hour before a meal or 2 hours after). This helps prevent nausea. You should take this medication around the same time each day. Swallow the capsules whole with a glass of water; do not open, crush, or chew them. If a capsule does break open, be careful not to inhale any of the powder. If there is contact with the powder, wash with water right away and call your provider or pharmacist for further instructions.

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.

When taking temozolomide in conjunction with radiation, you will be given a medication to prevent a certain type of pneumonia called PCP.

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?

Oral temozolomide is available through retail pharmacies. Your oncology team will work with your prescription drug plan to identify an in-network pharmacy for the distribution of this medication.

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 resources if they are available.

The oral form of temozolomide is covered under Medicare part B for Medicare recipients. Make sure your pharmacist knows to process this prescription through your Medicare part B and NOT part D.

Possible Side Effects of Temozolomide

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

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

Nausea may be helped by taking on an empty stomach and at bedtime. Talk to your doctor or nurse so they can prescribe medications to help you manage [nausea and vomiting](#), which you can take about 30 minutes prior to the dose. 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 doctor or nurse 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 bathe daily and perform frequent [mouth care](#).
- Do not cut cuticles or ingrown nails. You may wear nail polish, but not fake nails.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before scheduling dental appointments or procedures.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before you, or someone you live with has any vaccinations.

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.
- Do not floss or use toothpicks and use a soft-bristle toothbrush to brush your teeth.

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.

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 constipation](#).

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.

Muscle or Joint Pain/Aches and Headache

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

Rash

Some patients may develop a rash, scaly skin, or red itchy bumps. Use an alcohol-free moisturizer on your skin and lips; avoid moisturizers with perfumes or scents. Your oncology care team 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 oncology care team of any rash that develops, as this can be a reaction. They can give you more tips on [caring for your skin](#).

Convulsions

This medication can cause a convulsion, where your muscles contract involuntarily. Convulsions can happen on their own, or can happen with a seizure. If you or a loved one notice twitching or jerking of your arms and/or legs, pale or bluish skin, eye-rolling, foaming at the mouth, or loss of consciousness, call 911 right away.

Important but Less Common Side Effects

- **Liver Toxicity:** This medication can cause liver toxicity, which your doctor 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 pain in your abdomen, as these can be signs of liver toxicity.
- **Pneumonia:** A certain kind of fungal lung infection, called pneumocystis pneumonia, can happen while

taking this medication.

- **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.

Sexual & Reproductive Concerns

This medication may affect a man's ability to have children. You may want to consider sperm banking if you may wish to have a child in the future. Discuss these options with your oncology team.

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 6 months after treatment for women. Men should use effective birth control during and for 3 months after treatment. Even if your menstrual cycle stops or you believe you are not producing sperm, you could still be fertile and conceive.

Men should not donate sperm during or for 3 months after treatment. You should not breastfeed during or for one week after treatment.

Vinblastine (Velban®, Alkaban AQ)

Pronounce: vin-BLAS-teen

Classification: Antimicrotubule Agent/Vinca Alkaloid

About Vinblastine (Velban®, Alkaban AQ)

Vinblastine is a member of the vinca alkaloids family of chemotherapy agents. These medications work by interfering with cell division, which leaves the tumor unable to grow and spread. Vinblastine was developed from the Madagascar periwinkle plant.

How to Take Vinblastine

This medication is administered intravenously (IV, into a vein), by a trained professional. Specific dosage and dosing schedule depends on the person's size and the type of cancer being treated.

This medication is a vesicant. Even when carefully and correctly administered by trained personnel, this drug may cause a feeling of burning and pain. There is a risk that this medication may leak out of the vein at the injection site, resulting in tissue damage that can be severe. If the area of injection becomes red, swollen, or painful at any time during or after the injection, notify your doctor or nurse immediately. Do not apply anything to the site unless instructed by your doctor or nurse.

The blood levels of this medication can be affected by certain foods and medications, so they should be avoided. These include: grapefruit, grapefruit juice, ketoconazole, rifampin, phenytoin, St. John's wort, and many anti-fungal medications. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about all medications and supplements you take.

Possible Side Effects of Vinblastine

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

Constipation

Vinblastine can cause serious constipation, abdominal pain and can even lead to a blockage or stoppage of the bowel (called paralytic ileus) if not treated promptly. 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](#).

Neurotoxicity

This is a toxicity that affects the nerves. The most common effect is called peripheral neuropathy, which affects the nerves in the hands and feet, causing causes numbness or tingling, often in the pattern of a stocking or glove. This can get progressively worse with additional doses of the medication and can lead to difficulty with balance or walking. In some people, the symptoms slowly resolve after the medication is stopped, but for some, it never goes away completely. You should let your healthcare provider know if you experience numbness or tingling in the hands and feet, as they may need to adjust the doses of your medication.

The vinca alkaloid chemotherapies are known to cause neuropathy, but they can also cause neurologic toxicity that presents as mental depression, headache, malaise, dizziness, and seizures. It can also cause toxicity of the cranial nerves, which affects the vocal cords (changes in voice), eyes (visual changes) or facial nerves (drooping of the face or mouth). Patients can develop severe pain in the jaw soon after the first treatment with vincristine, which is caused by the medication affecting the nerves. If you notice any of these problems, notify your healthcare team right away.

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 bathe 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.

Mouth Ulcers (Sores)

Certain cancer treatments can cause [sores or soreness in your mouth](#) and/or throat. Notify your doctor or nurse 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 warm water mouth rinse (2 level

teaspoons of baking soda or 1 level teaspoon 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.

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.

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.

Decrease in Appetite or Taste Changes

[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 oncology care team 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.

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.

Nausea and/or Vomiting

Talk to your doctor or nurse 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 doctor or nurse if you are unable to keep fluids down for more than 12 hours or if you feel lightheaded or dizzy at any time.

Important but Less Common Side Effects

- **Urinary retention:** Some patients may experience an inability to urinate (even when you feel that you need to). If you notice you are unable to urinate, you should call your healthcare team right away or go to the emergency room to be evaluated.
- **Pain in tumor-containing tissue:** Some patients may experience pain in tumor-containing tissue. This is thought to occur due to swelling of that area during its response to treatment.
- **Radiation Recall:** This medication may cause radiation recall. It may present as a skin reaction that looks like a sunburn (redness, swelling, soreness, peeling skin) in areas where radiation was previously given. Notify your oncology care team if you notice this side effect. Treatment can include topical steroid ointments and a delay in your next chemotherapy dose.

Sexual & Reproductive Concerns

This drug may affect your reproductive system, resulting in the menstrual cycle or sperm production becoming irregular or stopping permanently. In addition, the desire for sex may decrease during treatment.

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

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