

Weekly Paclitaxel (Taxol)

This leaflet is offered as a guide to you and your family. The possible benefits of treatment vary; for some people chemotherapy may reduce the risk of the cancer coming back, for others it may control the cancer and its symptoms. Your doctor will explain to you whether you will receive chemotherapy or another type of treatment, or a combination of both. Your doctor or nurse will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment. You will find it useful to refer to the booklet 'Chemotherapy, a guide' which gives general information on chemotherapy and side effects.

Your treatment

Your doctor or nurse clinician has prescribed for you a course of treatment with paclitaxel chemotherapy. The chemotherapy is given into a vein via a drip. The treatment consists of the following:

Paclitaxel is given over 1 hour by a drip (or infusion) once weekly and up to 18 weeks in total.

You will have a routine blood test before the start of each cycle of treatment. Occasionally we may not be able to go ahead with your treatment until your blood counts are back to a safe level. If this happens, your chemotherapy may be delayed a week.

Paclitaxel can rarely cause an allergic reaction. To prevent this happening, we will give you pre-medication injections 30 minutes before starting the paclitaxel treatment.

This treatment can have serious or possibly life-threatening side effects. It is very important that you report side effects straight away. Don't delay, if you feel unwell, please ring The Christie Hotline on 0161 446 3658. The lines are open 24 hours a day.

Possible side effects

Chemotherapy can cause many different side effects. Some are more likely to occur than others. Everyone is different and not everyone gets all the side effects. Most side effects are usually temporary, but in some rare cases they can be life-threatening. It is important to tell your hospital doctor or nurse about any side effects so they can be monitored and, where possible, treated.



Allergic reaction

A small number of patients can have an allergic reaction to **paclitaxel**. Reactions can include breathlessness, a feeling of dizziness, skin rashes, itching, a high temperature, shivering, redness of the face, headache, anxiety, and a desire to pass urine. You will be monitored throughout your treatment for any signs of an allergic reaction but it is important to tell your nurse or doctor if you have any of these signs, or feel unwell in any way.

Extravasation is when chemotherapy leaks outside the vein. If you develop redness, soreness or pain at the injection site **at any time** please let us know straight away. Paclitaxel can cause pain where the injection is given, or along the vein. If you feel pain, tell your doctor or nurse as they can slow the drip to reduce the reaction.

Common side effects (more than 1 in 100)



- **Increased risk of serious infection**

You are vulnerable to infection while you are having chemotherapy. Minor infections can become life-threatening in a matter of hours if left untreated. Symptoms of infection include fever, shivering, sweats, sore throat, diarrhoea, discomfort when you pass urine, cough or breathlessness. We recommend that you use a digital thermometer so you can check your temperature. You can buy one from your local chemist.

If you feel unwell, you have symptoms of an infection or your temperature is 37.5°C or above, or below 36°C contact The Christie Hotline straight away.



- **Anaemia (low number of red blood cells)**

While having this treatment you may become anaemic. This may make you feel tired and breathless. Let your doctor or nurse know if these symptoms are a problem. You may need a blood transfusion.

- **Nausea and vomiting (sickness)**

The severity of this varies from person to person. Anti-sickness medication may be given along with your chemotherapy to prevent this. You may also be given anti-sickness tablets to take at home. If you continue to feel or be sick, contact your GP or this hospital, because your anti-sickness medication may need to be changed or increased.

- **Hair loss**

Hair loss is usually total. The hair falls out gradually 10 to 14 days following your first course of treatment. Body and facial hair can also fall out. The time scale varies from person to person. Please remember that this is a temporary side effect and your hair will grow back when your treatment is complete. Very rarely, hair loss can be permanent. If you would like an appointment with the wig service, this can be arranged for you by visiting the cancer information centre. Ask the staff for a copy of the 'Wig fitting service'.

The Maggie's Centre runs a Talking Heads hair loss support workshop for anyone who is anticipating or experiencing hair loss (both men and women). These sessions cover the practicalities of hair loss as well as offering support with its emotional impact. Contact Maggie's on **0161 641 4848** or email **manchester@maggiescentres.org**

- **Tingling and numbness in the fingers or toes**

This is due to the effect of paclitaxel on the nerves and is known as peripheral neuropathy. You may also notice that you have difficulty doing up buttons or similar tasks. Tell your doctor if you notice any numbness or tingling in your hands or feet. This usually improves a few months after treatment has finished although this may be permanent

- **Lethargy**

Some chemotherapy may make you feel tired and lacking in energy. It can be frustrating when you feel unable to cope with routine tasks. If you do feel tired, take rest and get help with household chores. If necessary, take time off work. Gentle exercise, such as walking, can be beneficial.

- **Muscle and joint pains**

Sometimes you may experience pain in the muscles in your legs. A simple painkiller will help. Ask your doctor for advice on this.

- **Sore mouth**

Your mouth may become sore or dry, or you may notice small mouth ulcers during this treatment. Drinking plenty of fluids and cleaning your teeth regularly and gently with a soft toothbrush can help to reduce the risk of this happening. We can prescribe a mouthwash for you to use during treatment. You can dilute this with water if your mouth is sore. Ask your doctor or nurse for further advice. There is also general mouth care information in the chemotherapy booklet. If you continue to have a sore mouth, please contact The Christie Hotline.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)



- **Bruising or bleeding**

This treatment can reduce the production of platelets which help the blood clot. Let your doctor know if you have any unexplained bruising or bleeding, such as nosebleeds, bloodspots or rashes on the skin, and bleeding gums. You may need a platelet transfusion.



- **Diarrhoea**

If this becomes a problem while you are having treatment, anti-diarrhoea tablets can be bought from a pharmacy or prescribed by your GP for a temporary period until this is resolved. If the problem persists contact this hospital. **If you develop severe diarrhoea it is important to contact this hospital straightaway as this may be a sign of a serious infection. Don't delay!**

- **Constipation**

Try to drink plenty of fluids. Report this to your hospital doctor or nurse who can advise you regarding diet and who may prescribe a suitable laxative. Ask the staff for a copy of Eating: Help Yourself which has useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

- **Low blood pressure**

Your blood pressure will be checked during your treatment. Let the doctor know if you feel faint or dizzy.

- **Changes in heart rate**

Paclitaxel can sometimes cause a temporary slowing of the heart rate known as bradycardia. This usually does not cause any harm.

- **Abdominal pain**

This may start a few days after finishing chemotherapy and may last for a few days. Please contact the hospital if this happens. Your doctor can prescribe painkillers if appropriate.

- **Changes of taste**

You may notice that food tastes different. Normal taste usually comes back after treatment finishes.

- **Nail changes**

May cause nail changes and discolouration of the nail bed.

Serious and potentially life threatening side effects

In a small proportion of patients chemotherapy can result in very severe side effects which may rarely result in death. The team caring for you will discuss the risk of these side effects with you.

Other medicines

Some medicines can be harmful to take when you are having chemotherapy. Let your doctor know about any medications you are taking, including non-prescribed medicines such as complementary therapies and herbal remedies.

Sex, contraception & fertility

Protecting your partner and contraception: We recommend that you or your partner use a condom during sexual intercourse while you are having the course of chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is dangerous to unborn babies and this will also protect you and your partner from any chemotherapy drugs that may be present in semen and in the vagina. If you suspect that you may be pregnant please tell your doctor immediately.

Fertility: This chemotherapy may affect your ability to have children. Your doctor or nurse should have discussed this with you. If not, please ask them before you start treatment.

Loss of periods: Due to the effects of chemotherapy on the ovaries you may find that your periods become irregular or may eventually stop. In younger women this may be temporary, but if you are closer to your menopause it may be permanent. This will result in hot flushes, sweats and vaginal dryness.

Late side effects

Some side effects may become evident only after a number of years. In reaching any decision with you about treatment, the potential benefit you receive from treatment will be weighed against the risks of serious long term side effects to the heart, lungs, kidneys and bone marrow. With some drugs there is also a small but definite risk of an increased chance of developing another cancer. If any of these problems specifically applies to you, the doctor will discuss these with you and note this on your consent form.

Contacts

If you have any general questions or concerns about your treatment, please ring the area where you are having treatment:

- Administration enquiries **0161 918 7606/7610**
- Chemotherapy nurse: **0161 918 7171**
- Clinical trials unit **0161 918 7663**

For advice ring The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658** (24 hours)

Your consultant is:

Your hospital number is:

Your key worker is:

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most **up-to-date** scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact patient.information@christie.nhs.uk

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For information about The Christie and our services, please visit www.christie.nhs.uk or visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford.

Contact The Christie Hotline for urgent support and specialist advice

**The Christie Hotline:
0161 446 3658**

Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

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