



**For the Patient: Epirubicin**  
Other names: PHARMORUBICIN®

**BC Cancer Agency**

- Epirubicin (eppy-ROO-biss-in) is a drug that is used to treat many types of cancers. It is a red liquid that is injected into a vein.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to epirubicin, doxorubicin, daunorubicin, idarubicin, mitoxantrone, or mitomycin before treatment begins.
- A **blood test** may be taken before each treatment. The dose and timing of your chemotherapy may be changed based on the test results and/or other side effects.
- Other drugs such as cimetidine (TAGAMET®) and verapamil (CHRONOVERA®, ISOPTIN®) may **interact** with epirubicin. Tell your doctor if you are taking these or any other drugs as you may need extra blood tests or your dose may need to be changed. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any new drugs.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of epirubicin.
- Epirubicin may cause **sterility** in men and **menopause** in women. If you plan to have children, discuss this with your doctor before being treated with epirubicin.
- Epirubicin may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with epirubicin. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.
- **Tell** doctors or dentists that you are being treated with epirubicin before you receive any treatment from them.

Side effects are listed in the following table in the order in which they may occur. Tips to help manage the side effects are included.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Epirubicin <b>burns</b> if it leaks under the skin.	Tell your nurse or doctor <b>immediately</b> if you feel burning, stinging or any other change while the drug is being given.
Your <b>urine may be pink or reddish</b> for 1-2 days after your treatment.	This is expected as epirubicin is red and is passed in your urine.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Nausea and vomiting</b> may occur after your treatment and usually ends within 24 hours.</p>	<p>You may be given a prescription for antinausea drug(s) to take before your chemotherapy treatment and/or at home. It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred, so follow directions closely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink plenty of liquids.</li> <li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in <i>Food Choices to Control Nausea</i>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Diarrhea</b> may occur.</p>	<p>To help diarrhea:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink plenty of liquids.</li> <li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li> <li>• Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Diarrhea During Chemotherapy</i>.</li> </ul>
<p>Your <b>white blood cells</b> may decrease 1-2 weeks after your treatment. They usually return to normal 3 weeks after your last treatment. White blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. When they are low, <b>you are at greater risk of having an infection.</b></p>	<p>To help prevent infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wash your hands often and always after using the bathroom.</li> <li>• Take care of your skin and mouth.</li> <li>• Avoid crowds and people who are sick.</li> <li>• Call your doctor <b><i>immediately</i></b> at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.</li> </ul>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Your <b>platelets</b> may decrease 1-2 weeks after your treatment. They usually return to normal 3 weeks after your last treatment. Platelets help to make your blood clot when you hurt yourself. <b>You may bruise or bleed more easily than usual.</b></p>	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try not to bruise, cut, or burn yourself.</li> <li>• Clean your nose by blowing gently. Do not pick your nose.</li> <li>• Avoid constipation.</li> <li>• Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily. Maintain good oral hygiene.</li> </ul> <p>Some medications such as ASA (e.g., ASPIRIN®) or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) may increase your risk of bleeding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., <b>ASA for your heart</b>).</li> <li>• For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) first, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sore mouth</b> may occur a few days after treatment. Mouth sores can occur on the tongue, the sides of the mouth or in the throat. <b>Mouth sores or bleeding gums can lead to an infection.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brush your teeth gently after eating and at bedtime with a very soft toothbrush. If your gums bleed, use gauze instead of a brush. Use baking soda instead of toothpaste.</li> <li>• Make a mouthwash with ½ teaspoon baking soda or salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day.</li> <li>• Try soft, bland foods like puddings, milkshakes and cream soups.</li> <li>• Avoid spicy, crunchy or acidic food, and very hot or cold foods.</li> <li>• Try ideas in the two handouts; <i>Easy to Chew Recipes</i> and <i>Soft, Moist Food Ideas</i>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tiredness</b> and lack of energy may occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you are feeling tired.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in <i>Your Bank of Energy Savings: How People with Cancer Can Handle Fatigue</i>.</li> </ul>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Hair loss is common</b> and may begin within a few days or weeks of treatment. Your hair may thin or you may become totally bald. Your scalp may feel tender. You may lose hair on your face and body. Your hair will grow back once your treatments are over and sometimes between treatments. Colour and texture may change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a gentle shampoo and soft brush.</li> <li>• Care should be taken with use of hair spray, bleaches, dyes and perms.</li> <li>• Protect your scalp with a hat, scarf or wig in cold weather. Some extended health plans will pay part of the cost of a wig.</li> <li>• Cover your head or apply sunblock on sunny days.</li> <li>• Apply mineral oil to your scalp to reduce itching.</li> <li>• If you lose your eyelashes and eyebrows, protect your eyes from dust and grit with a broad-rimmed hat and glasses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pain or tenderness</b> may occur where the needle was placed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.</li> </ul>
<p>Your <b>skin may redden</b> where you have had radiation treatments.</p>	<p>This will slowly return to normal once you stop treatment with epirubicin.</p>

### SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of an **allergic reaction** (rare) soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling or breathing problems.
- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer); chills; cough; pain or burning when you pass urine.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black tarry stools, blood in urine, pinpoint red spots on skin, extensive bruising.
- Signs of a **blood clot** such as tenderness or hardness over a vein, calf swelling and tenderness, sudden onset of cough, chest pain or shortness of breath.

### SEE YOUR DOCTOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:

- Severe **skin reaction** where you have had radiation.
- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- **Skin rash** or **itching**.
- Signs of **heart or lung problems** such as fast or uneven heartbeat, chest pain, chest pressure, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, swelling of ankles or fainting.

### CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONTINUE OR BOTHER YOU:

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting or diarrhea.
- Easy bruising or minor bleeding.

