



**For the Patient: Gefitinib**  
Other names: Iressa®, ZD 1839

**BC Cancer Agency**

- **Gefitinib** (ge-FI-tye-nib) is a drug that is used to treat a type of lung cancer. It is a tablet that you take by mouth.
- It is important to **take** gefitinib exactly as directed by your doctor. Gefitinib can be taken with food or on an empty stomach with a glass of water.
- Grapefruit juice does not appear to affect the usefulness of gefitinib. However, the manufacturer recommends avoiding grapefruit juice while receiving gefitinib therapy due to a theoretical interaction.
- **Take** your tablets at the same time each day in the morning exactly as directed by your doctor. Make sure you understand the directions.
- **Do not crush the tablet.** If unable to swallow the tablet whole, it should be dropped in a 1-2 oz (50 mL) glass of lukewarm water, allowed to dissolve, and swallowed. Another 50 mL of water should be used to rinse the glass and then it should be swallowed to ensure that all of the drug has been taken.
- If you **vomit** the dose of gefitinib within 30 minutes of taking it, you can repeat the dose and let the doctor know as a medication to prevent nausea will be required.
- If you **miss a dose** of gefitinib, take it as soon as you can if it is within 12 hours of the missed dose. If it is over 12 hours since your missed dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your usual dosing times.
- **Store** tablets out of the reach of children, at room temperature, away from heat, light and moisture.
- Other drugs and herbs such as barbiturates, carbamazepine (Tegretol®), phenytoin (Dilantin®), rifampicin, St. John's wort, warfarin (Coumadin®), some antifungals such as ketoconazole, and some stomach medicines such as ranitidine (Zantac®) may **interact** with gefitinib. Tell your doctor if you are taking any of these 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 gefitinib.

- Gefitinib may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with gefitinib. 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 gefitinib 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
Skin reactions such as <b>rash, dryness, or itchiness</b> may be common.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moisturizing creams can help prevent or reduce skin dryness.</li> <li>• If skin reactions persist or get worse, contact the doctor.</li> </ul>
<b>Diarrhea</b> may occur.	To help <b>with</b> diarrhea: <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>Coping with Diarrhea</i>.</li> <li>• A prescription for Loperamide (Imodium®) is sometimes required to treat diarrhea.</li> </ul>
<b>Nausea and vomiting</b> may occur.	You may be given a prescription for antinausea drug(s) to take at home. It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred, so follow directions closely. <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>
<b>Tiredness</b> and lack of energy may occur.	<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>
<b>Decreased appetite</b> sometimes occurs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to eat regular meals and consult a nutritionist if your weight is starting to decrease.</li> </ul>

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

- Signs of **lung problems** that are *new* or suddenly *getting worse*, such as dry cough or shortness of breath.

