



Provincial Health Services Authority

For the Patient: Arsenic trioxide
Other names: TRISENOX®

- **Arsenic trioxide** (ar' se nik trye ox' ide) is a drug that is used to treat some kinds of cancer. It is a clear liquid that is injected into a vein.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to arsenic trioxide before receiving arsenic trioxide.
- **Blood tests** may be taken regularly during treatment.
- Other drugs may **interact** with arsenic trioxide. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start or stop taking any other drugs.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of arsenic trioxide.
- Arsenic trioxide may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with arsenic trioxide and for three months after treatment has ended. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breastfeed during treatment and for three months after treatment has ended.
- **Tell** doctors, dentists, and other health professionals that you are being treated with arsenic trioxide before you receive any treatment from them.

Changes in blood counts

Arsenic trioxide may cause temporary changes in your blood counts. Your doctor will be following these changes carefully by performing blood tests. Adjustment of your treatment may be needed in certain circumstances.

BLOOD COUNTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Normal white blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. When they are low, you are at greater risk of having an infection.</p>	<p>To help prevent infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often and always after using the bathroom. • Avoid crowds and people who are sick. • Call your doctor immediately 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.

BLOOD COUNTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Normal platelets help your blood to clot normally after an injury (e.g., cut). When the platelet count is low, you may be more likely to bruise or bleed.</p>	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not to bruise, cut, or burn yourself. • Clean your nose by blowing gently. Do not pick your nose. • Avoid constipation. • Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily. <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"> • Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., ASA for your heart) without checking with your doctor first. • For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®). Check with your doctor if your pain is not controlled.

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
<p>Allergic reactions may rarely occur. Signs of an allergic reaction may include flushing, rash, itching, dizziness, swelling or breathing problems.</p>	<p>Tell your nurse if this happens while you are receiving arsenic trioxide or contact your oncologist immediately if this happens after you leave the clinic.</p>
<p>Arsenic trioxide burns if it leaks under the skin.</p>	<p>Tell your nurse or doctor immediately if you feel burning, stinging, or any other change while the drug is being given.</p>
<p>Pain or tenderness may occur where the needle was placed.</p>	<p>Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.</p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Nausea and vomiting may occur after your treatment.	You will 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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of fluids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Try the ideas in <i>Practical Tips to Manage Nausea</i>.*
Abnormal heart rhythm (QT prolongation) commonly occurs.	Minimize your risk of abnormal heart rhythm by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>always checking with your pharmacist and doctor about drug interactions when starting a new medication, herbal product, or supplement.</i> Get emergency help immediately if your heart is beating irregularly or fast OR if you feel faint, lightheaded, or dizzy.
Minor bleeding, such as nosebleeds , may sometimes occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit up straight and tip your head slightly forward. Tilting your head back may cause blood to run down your throat. • Pinch your nostrils shut between your thumb and forefinger or apply firm pressure against the bleeding nostril for 10 full minutes. • After 10 minutes, check to see if your nose is still bleeding. If it is, hold it for 10 more minutes. • Stay quiet for a few hours and do not blow your nose for at least 12 hours after the bleeding has stopped. • Get emergency help if a nosebleed lasts longer than 20 minutes.
Skin rash, sores, dryness, or peeling may sometimes occur.	If itching is very irritating, call your doctor. Otherwise, be sure to mention it at your next visit.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Fever and chills may sometimes occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day. • Fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer) which occurs more than a few days after treatment may be a sign of an infection. Report this to your doctor immediately.
Diarrhea may sometimes occur.	<p>If diarrhea is a problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of fluids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in Food Choices to Help Manage Diarrhea.*
Constipation may sometimes occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise if you can. • Drink plenty of fluids. • Try ideas in Food Choices to Manage Constipation.*
Sore mouth may sometimes occur a few days after treatment. Mouth sores can occur on the tongue, the sides of the mouth, or in the throat. Mouth sores or bleeding gums can lead to an infection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Make a mouthwash with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon baking soda AND $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day. • Try the ideas in Food Ideas to Try with a Sore Mouth.*
Headache may sometimes occur.	Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours if needed, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day.
Muscle, joint, or other pain may sometimes occur.	You may take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day. Tell your doctor if the pain interferes with your activity.
Sugar control may sometimes be affected in diabetic patients.	Check your blood sugar regularly if you are diabetic.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Swelling of hands, feet, or lower legs may sometimes occur if your body retains extra fluid.	If swelling is a problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate your feet when sitting. • Avoid tight clothing. • Tell your doctor at your next visit.
You may sometimes have trouble sleeping .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to your doctor if you continue to have trouble sleeping. • This will return to normal when you stop receiving arsenic trioxide treatment.
Tiredness and lack of energy commonly occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you are feeling tired. • Try the ideas in Fatigue/Tiredness – Patient Handout.*
Hair loss does not occur with arsenic trioxide.	
Numbness or tingling of the fingers or toes may sometimes occur. This should slowly return to normal once your treatments are over. This may take several months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be careful when handling items that are sharp, hot, or cold. • Tell your doctor at your next visit, especially if you have trouble with buttons, writing, or picking up small objects.

*Please ask your chemotherapy nurse or pharmacist for a copy.

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 **differentiation syndrome** such as difficulty breathing, coughing, chest pain, fever, and weight gain.
- Signs of **heart problems** such as fast or uneven heartbeat, chest pain, or fainting.
- **Seizures** and **muscle weakness** or **confusion**.
- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), shaking chills; severe sore throat, productive cough (coughing up thick or green sputum); cloudy or foul smelling urine; painful, tender, or swollen red skin wounds or sores.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black, tarry stools; blood in urine; extensive bruising.

