

**BC Cancer Agency****For the Patient:** Asparaginase

Other names: asparaginase (KIDROLASE®), Erwinia L-asparaginase (ERWINIA®), pegaspargase (ONCASPAR®)

- **Asparaginase** (a-SPARE-a-gi-nase) is a drug that is used to treat many types of cancers. It is a clear liquid that is injected into a vein or muscle or under the skin.
- There are **three types** of asparaginase: asparaginase, Erwinia asparaginase, and pegaspargase (peg-AS-par-jase). Your doctor will decide which type will be the most effective for you.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to any of the three types of asparaginase before taking asparaginase.
- 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.
- **Alcohol** may increase the risk of liver problems with this drug and should be avoided.
- It is not known if this drug can cause **sterility** in men or **menopause** in women. If you plan to have children, discuss this with your doctor before being treated.
- This drug may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with this drug. 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 this drug before you receive any treatment from them.

### Changes in blood counts

This drug 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. <b>When they are low, 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>• Avoid crowds and people who are sick.</li> <li>• Call your doctor <b>immediately</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>
<p>Normal platelets help your blood to clot normally after an injury (e.g., cut). <b>When the platelet count is low you may be more likely to bruise or bleed.</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>

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><b>Allergic reactions</b> may <b>sometimes</b> occur. Signs of an allergic reaction may include flushing, rash, itching, dizziness, swelling or breathing problems. This can occur immediately or several hours after receiving this drug.</p>	<p>Tell your nurse if this happens while you are receiving asparaginase or contact your oncologist immediately if this happens after you leave the clinic.</p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<b>Pain or tenderness</b> may occur where the needle was placed.	Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.
<b>Nausea</b> is rare with this drug.	
<b>Loss of appetite</b> and <b>weight loss</b> sometimes occur and may persist after discontinuation of the drug.	Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Decreased Appetite</i> .*
<b>Tiredness</b> and <b>lack of energy</b> sometimes occur with this drug.	<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>Hair loss</b> does not occur with this drug.	

\*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** soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling, or breathing problems.
- Signs of a **stroke** such as sudden onset of: severe headache, eyesight changes, slurred speech, loss of coordination, weakness or numbness in arm or leg.
- **Severe** abdominal pain.
- **Excessive** thirst or **increased** quantity or frequency of urination.
- 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.
- **Seizures** or **loss of consciousness**.
- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), shaking chills; cough, 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.

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

- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Signs of **kidney problems** such as lower back or side pain, swelling of feet or lower legs.
- **Dizziness, lightheadedness, or feeling of faintness.**
- **Numbness or tingling** in feet or hands.

