



Provincial Health Services Authority

For the Patient: Cetuximab

Other names: ERBITUX®

- **Cetuximab** (se tux' i mab) is a drug that is used to treat some types of cancer. It is a monoclonal antibody, a type of protein designed to target and interfere with the growth of cancer cells. 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 cetuximab or other antibody treatment before receiving cetuximab.
- 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.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of cetuximab.
- Cetuximab may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with cetuximab. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.
- **Tell** doctors, dentists, and other health professionals that you are being treated with cetuximab 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
Chills, fever, and swelling commonly occur during the first cetuximab infusion. You may also experience shivering, problems breathing, dizziness, headache, or hoarseness. Reactions are less common with later treatments.	Tell your nurse or doctor immediately if you have a reaction during your treatment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your cetuximab may be temporarily stopped and then given more slowly. • You may be given other drugs to treat the reaction.
Pain or tenderness may occur where the needle was placed.	Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Nausea and vomiting may occur after your treatment.</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"> • Drink plenty of fluids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Try the ideas in Practical Tips to Manage Nausea.*
<p>Skin reactions such as acne, rash, dryness or itchiness commonly occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid direct sunlight and tanning salons during treatment and for 2 months following treatment. • Wear a hat, long sleeves, and long pants outside on sunny days. • Wear a sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB and has a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. Apply liberally, 30 minutes before exposure. Reapply every 2 hours and after swimming. • Refer to <i>Your Medication Sun Sensitivity and Sunscreens*</i> or the <i>BC Health Guide</i> for more information • If skin reaction persists or get worse, call your doctor. Otherwise, be sure to mention it at your next visit.
<p>Diarrhea may sometimes occur.</p>	<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.*
<p>Constipation may sometimes occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise if you can. • Drink plenty of fluids. • Try ideas in Food Choices to Manage Constipation.*

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Increased bone 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 or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) for mild to moderate pain. Tell your doctor if the pain interferes with your activity.
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.
Nail changes , especially of the big toes and thumbs, may occur.	If nails are painful, you may take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) for mild to moderate pain. Tell your doctor if the pain interferes with your activity. Otherwise, be sure to mention it at your next visit.
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.
You may 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 taking cetuximab.
Loss of appetite and weight loss are common.	Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Decreased Appetite</i> .*
Tiredness and lack of energy may occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you are feeling tired. • Try the ideas in <i>Fatigue/Tiredness – Patient Handout</i>.*
Hair loss is rare with cetuximab. If you lose hair, it will grow back once you stop treatment with cetuximab. Colour and texture may change.	If hair loss is a problem, refer to <i>For the Resources for Hair Loss and Appearance Changes – Patient Handout</i> .*

***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 fever, dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling, chills or breathing problems.
- Signs of **heart or lung problems** such as fast or uneven heartbeat, chest pain, chest pressure, **shortness of breath** or difficulty in breathing, swelling of feet or lower legs, or fainting.
- **Seizures** or **loss of consciousness**.
- 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.

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

- Severe **skin reaction**, including the area around the nails, that is painful, red, or swollen.
- Unusual **tiredness** or weakness.
- 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.
- **Numbness or tingling** in feet or hands.
- **Changes in eyesight**, eye pain, sensitivity to light, or severe eye redness.

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

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, loss of appetite or weight loss.
- Dry mouth or increased thirst.
- Headache or other pain not controlled with acetaminophen (e.g., **TYLENOL®**).
- Redness, swelling, pain, or sores on your lips, tongue, mouth, or throat.
- Skin rash or dry, itchy skin.
- Easy bruising or minor bleeding.
- Changes to eyelashes or eyebrow hair
- Confusion, anxiety or depression, or trouble sleeping.

REPORT ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS TO YOUR DOCTOR
