



For the Patient: Cytarabine injection

Other names: CYTOSAR®

BC Cancer Agency

- Cytarabine (sye-TARE-a-been) is a drug that is used to treat many types of cancer. It is a clear liquid that is injected into a vein, muscle, or under the skin.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to cytarabine before taking cytarabine.
- 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 digoxin (LANOXIN®) may **interact** with cytarabine. Tell your doctor if you are taking this 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 cytarabine.
- Cytarabine may cause **sterility** in men and **menopause** in women. If you plan to have children, discuss this with your doctor before being treated with cytarabine.
- Cytarabine may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with cytarabine. 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 cytarabine before you receive any treatment from them.

Changes in blood counts

Cytarabine 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.
<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), but do discuss this with your doctor. • For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) first, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable.

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>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
<p>Nausea and vomiting may occur after your treatment and may last for 48 hours. Most people have little or no nausea. Nausea and vomiting are more common with higher doses.</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. <p>Try the ideas in <i>Food Choices to Help Control Nausea</i>.*</p>
<p>Fever may commonly occur shortly after treatment with cytarabine. Fever should last no longer than 24 hours.</p>	<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 which occurs more than a few days after treatment may be the sign of an infection.
<p>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. Sore mouth is more common with higher doses.</p>	<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 ½ teaspoon baking soda or salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day. • Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas for a Sore Mouth during Chemotherapy</i>.*
<p>Confusion, memory loss, and/or abnormal speech or body movements may sometimes occur. These symptoms are more common with higher doses and usually go away without any treatment in 5-10 days.</p>	<p>Call your doctor during office hours to report these symptoms.</p>
<p>Loss of appetite may sometimes occur and may persist after discontinuation of cytarabine.</p>	<p>Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Decreased Appetite</i>.*</p>
<p>Hair loss is rare with cytarabine. Hair loss is more common with higher doses. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with cytarabine. Colour and texture may change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a gentle shampoo and soft brush. • Care should be taken with use of hair spray, bleaches, dyes, and perms.

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

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

- 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.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black, tarry stools; blood in urine; pinpoint red spots on skin; extensive bruising.
- Signs of an **allergic reaction** (rare) soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling, or breathing problems.
- **Seizures or loss of consciousness.**
- 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 ankles, or fainting.

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

- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Signs of **gout** such as joint pain.
- **Numbness or tingling** in feet or hands.
- **Changes in eyesight or eye irritation.**
- Ringing in your ears or **hearing problems.**
- Difficulty **thinking** clearly and logically.
- Difficulty with **balance or trouble** walking or talking.

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

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or weight loss.
- Easy bruising or minor bleeding.
- Pain not controlled by acetaminophen.
- Redness, swelling, pain, or sores on your lips, tongue, mouth, or throat.
- Redness, swelling, pain, or sores where the needle was placed.
- Skin rash or itching.

REPORT ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS TO YOUR DOCTOR
