



Provincial Health Services Authority

**For the Patient: Docetaxel**  
Other names: TAXOTERE®

- **Docetaxel** (doe-se-TAX-el) is a drug that is used to treat some types 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 docetaxel, paclitaxel or cabazitaxel before receiving docetaxel.
- 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.
- You will be given a prescription for **dexamethasone** (eg, DECADRON®, DEXASONE®, HEXADROL®). Dexamethasone helps prevent nausea, fluid retention, and allergic reactions.
  - It is important to take the dexamethasone exactly as directed or you may not be able to have your treatment. On treatment days, it is especially important to take the morning dose before your treatment.
  - Always take dexamethasone with food.
  - The instructions regarding your dexamethasone may vary depending on the docetaxel treatment you are receiving.
  - **Weekly docetaxel treatment**
    - Start taking the dexamethasone 1 hour before your treatment.
  - **Every 3-weekly docetaxel treatment**
    - Start taking the dexamethasone the day before your treatment and continue taking it twice a day for 3 days. You must take at least 3 doses before your treatment.
- Other drugs such as disulfiram (ANTABUSE®), metronidazole (FLAGYL®), and ketoconazole (APO-KETOCONAZOLE®) may **interact** with docetaxel. Tell your doctor if you are taking these 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 or stop taking any other drugs.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of docetaxel.
- Docetaxel may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with docetaxel. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breastfeed during treatment.

- **Tell** your doctor, dentist, and other health professionals that you are being treated with docetaxel 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
<p><b>Allergic reactions</b> may sometimes occur. Signs of an allergic reaction may include rash, itching, dizziness, swelling or breathing problems, joint or muscle pain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take your <b>dexamethasone</b> tablets as directed by doctor, pharmacist, or nurse.</li> <li>• Tell your nurse if this happens while you are receiving docetaxel or contact your oncologist <b>immediately</b> if this happens after you leave the clinic.</li> </ul>
<p>Docetaxel <b>burns</b> if it leaks under the skin.</p>	<p>Tell your nurse or doctor <b>immediately</b> if you feel burning, stinging, or any other change while the drug is being given.</p>
<p><b>Pain</b> or <b>tenderness</b> 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>
<p><b>Fluid retention</b> may occur. Signs of extra fluid build-up are <b>swelling</b> of feet, hands or belly, breathing problems, cough, or rapid weight gain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take your <b>dexamethasone</b> tablets as directed by your healthcare team.</li> <li>• Elevate your feet when sitting.</li> <li>• Avoid tight clothing.</li> <li>• Tell your healthcare team at your next visit.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nausea</b> and <b>vomiting</b> may occur after your treatment. Most people have little or no nausea. <b>If you are vomiting and it is not controlled, you can quickly become dehydrated.</b></p>	<p>Take your <b>dexamethasone</b> tablets as directed by your healthcare team. You may be given a prescription for anti-nausea drug(s) to take before your chemotherapy treatment and/or at home. <b>It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred</b>, so follow directions closely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink plenty of fluids.</li> <li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in <i>Practical Tips to Manage Nausea</i>.*</li> </ul> <p><b>Tell your healthcare team if nausea or vomiting continues or is not controlled with your anti-nausea drug(s).</b></p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Fever</b> sometimes occurs shortly after treatment with docetaxel. Fever should last no longer than 24 hours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take acetaminophen (e.g., <b>TYLENOL®</b>) every 4-6 hours, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day.</li> <li>• Fever (over 38°C or 100°F by an oral thermometer) which occurs more than a few days after treatment may be a sign of an infection. Report this to your healthcare team <b>immediately</b>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Diarrhea</b> may sometimes occur. <a href="#">If you have diarrhea and it is not controlled, you can quickly become dehydrated.</a></p>	<p>If diarrhea is a problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink plenty of fluids.</li> <li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li> <li>• Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in <i>Food Choices to Help Manage Diarrhea</i>.* <p><a href="#">Tell your healthcare team if you have diarrhea for more than 24 hours.</a></p> </li></ul>
<p>Your <b>white blood cells</b> may decrease 7 days after your treatment. They usually return to normal 15 to 21 days after your last treatment. White blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. When they are low, <b>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 healthcare team <b>immediately</b> at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 38°C or 100°F by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sore mouth</b> may sometimes occur a few days after treatment. Mouth sores can occur on the tongue, the sides of the mouth, or in the throat. <b>Mouth sores or bleeding gums can lead to an infection.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Make a mouthwash with ¼ teaspoon baking soda AND ¼ teaspoon salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Try with a Sore Mouth</i>.*</li> </ul>
<p><b>Skin rashes</b> may sometimes occur. Rashes generally resolve before the next treatment.</p>	<p>If itching is very irritating, call your healthcare team. Otherwise, be sure to mention it at your next visit.</p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Nail changes</b> such as change in colour may occur. Rarely, nails will loosen or fall off, or the nail beds will be painful.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may be given frozen gloves to wear on your hands during your treatment to help prevent nail changes.</li> <li>If nails are painful, you may take acetaminophen (e.g., <b>TYLENOL®</b>) every 4-6 hours, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Muscle or joint pain</b> may occur a few days after your treatment.</p>	<p>You may take acetaminophen (e.g., <b>TYLENOL®</b>) every 4-6 hours to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day or ibuprofen (e.g., <b>ADVIL®</b>) for mild to moderate pain. Tell your healthcare team if the pain interferes with your activity.</p>
<p><b>Tiredness</b> and lack of energy may commonly occur.</p>	<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>Fatigue/Tiredness – Patient Handout</i>.*</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hair loss</b> is common and may begin within a few days or weeks of treatment. Your hair may thin or you may lose it completely. Your scalp may feel tender. Hair loss may occur on your face and body. In most cases, your hair will grow back once your treatments are over and sometimes between treatments. Rarely, hair may not grow back for more than two years. Colour and texture may change.</p>	<p>Refer to <i>Resources for Hair Loss and Appearance Changes – Patient Handout</i>.* You may also want to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply mineral oil to your scalp to reduce itching.</li> <li>If you lose your eyelashes and eyebrows, protect your eyes from dust and grit with a broad-rimmed hat and glasses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Numbness or tingling of the fingers or toes</b> may sometimes occur. This will slowly return to normal once your treatments are over. This may take several months.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be careful when handling items that are sharp, hot, or cold.</li> <li>Be careful when walking on uneven surfaces or doing activities that need you to balance or be steady</li> <li>Tell your healthcare team at your next visit, especially if you have trouble with buttons, writing, picking up small objects, walking, or have fallen.</li> </ul>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Hand-foot skin reaction</b> may rarely occur during docetaxel treatment. The palms of your hands and soles of your feet may tingle, become red, numb, painful, or swollen. Skin may also become dry or itchy. You may not be able to do your normal daily activities if blisters, severe pain, or ulcers occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid tight-fitting shoes or rubbing pressure to hands and feet, such as that caused by heavy activity.</li> <li>• Avoid tight-fitting jewellery.</li> <li>• Clean hands and feet with lukewarm water and gently pat to dry; avoid hot water.</li> <li>• Apply a sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 30.</li> <li>• Apply lanolin-containing creams (e.g., BAG BALM®, UDDERLY SMOOTH®) to hands and feet, liberally and often.</li> <li>• Tell your healthcare team at your next visit if you have any signs of hand-foot skin reaction as your dose may need to be changed.</li> </ul>

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

**CHECK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM 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 an **infection** such as fever (over 38°C or 100°F 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 **heart** such as fast or uneven heartbeat, chest pain, chest pressure, or fainting.
- Signs of **lung problems** such as shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, cough, and fever.
- 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.

**CHECK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:**

- Signs of **abdominal discomfort** including new pain, bloating or cramping.
- Signs of **fluid retention** such as bothersome swelling of feet or lower legs.
- Severe **skin reaction** where you have had radiation.
- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Ringing in your ears or **hearing problems**.
- Increased **sore throat or mouth** that makes it difficult to swallow comfortably.

