



For the Patient: Fludarabine tablets

Other names: FLUDARA®

BC Cancer Agency

- Fludarabine (floo-DARE-a-been) is a drug that is used to treat many types of cancer. It is a tablet that you take by mouth.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to fludarabine before taking fludarabine.
- 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.
- It is important to **take** fludarabine exactly as directed by your doctor. Make sure you understand the directions.
- You may **take** fludarabine with food or on an empty stomach with a glass of water or juice at approximately the same time each day.
- Do not chew or crush fludarabine tablets. **Swallow whole.**
- Do not remove fludarabine tablets from their **blister packaging** until ready to take them.
- If you **miss a dose** of fludarabine, take it as soon as you can if it is within 12 hours of the missed dose. If it is over 12 hours since your missed dose, call your doctor **during office hours** to ask about making up the missed dose.
- If you **vomit** the dose of fludarabine within 1 hour of taking it, do not take a second dose. Call your doctor during office hours for advice. You will be told whether you need to take another dose.
- Your doctor **may** tell you to **drink** plenty of liquids e.g., 8 cups (2000 mL or 70 oz) a day. This helps prevent kidney problems.
- Some immunizations (**flu shots and vaccines**) may be less effective during or within 1 year after fludarabine treatment. Some immunizations should not be used during or within 1 year after fludarabine treatment. Talk to your doctor before receiving any immunizations.
- Other drugs may **interact** with fludarabine. 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 fludarabine.
- It is not known if fludarabine causes **sterility** in men or **menopause** in women. If you plan to have children, discuss this with your doctor before being treated with fludarabine.
- Fludarabine may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with fludarabine and for six months after your last treatment. 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 fludarabine before you receive any treatment from them, **including blood transfusions**.

Changes in blood counts

Fludarabine 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. Maintain good oral hygiene. <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). • 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>Nausea does not usually occur with fludarabine.</p> | |
| <p>Skin rashes may sometimes occur.</p> | <p>To help itching:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can use calamine lotion. • If very irritating, call your doctor during office hours. • Otherwise make sure to mention it at your next visit. |
| <p>Diarrhea may sometimes occur.</p> | <p>To help diarrhea:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of liquids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Diarrhea During Chemotherapy</i>.* • Note: If lactose in milk usually gives you diarrhea, the lactose in the tablet may be causing your diarrhea. Take LACTAID® tablets just before your fludarabine dose. |

| SIDE EFFECTS | MANAGEMENT |
|--|--|
| Loss of appetite may sometimes occur and may persist for 1-2 months after discontinuation of fludarabine. | Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Decreased Appetite</i> .* |
| Headache may rarely occur. | Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours if needed, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day. |
| Muscle or joint pain may sometimes occur a few days after your treatment. | You may take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) for mild to moderate pain. Tell your doctor if the pain interferes with your activity. |
| 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. |
| Tiredness and lack of energy may sometimes occur and may persist after discontinuation of fludarabine. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you are feeling tired. • Try the ideas in <i>Your Bank of Energy Savings: How People with Cancer Can Handle Fatigue</i>.* |
| Numbness or tingling of the fingers or toes may sometimes occur. This will 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. |
| Blurred vision may sometimes occur. | Call your doctor during office hours if you notice any vision changes. |
| Hair loss is rare with fludarabine. If you lose hair, it will grow back once you stop treatment with fludarabine. Colour and texture may change. | <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.

STOP TAKING FLUDARABINE AND 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 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.

