



Provincial Health Services Authority

For the Patient: Gemcitabine

Other names: GEMZAR®

- **Gemcitabine** (jem-SITE-a-been) is a drug that is used to treat some kinds of cancer. It is a clear liquid that is injected into a vein.
- A **blood test** may be taken before each treatment. The dose and timing of your treatment may be changed based on the test results and/or other side effects.
- Other drugs such as warfarin (COUMADIN®) may **interact** with gemcitabine. Tell your doctor if you are taking this or 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 gemcitabine.
- Gemcitabine may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with gemcitabine. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.
- **Tell** your doctors, dentists, and other health professionals that you are being treated with gemcitabine 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
Pain or tenderness may occur where the needle was placed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.
A flu-like illness may occur shortly after your treatment. You may have fever, chills, headache, muscle and joint aches. Flu-like symptoms usually disappear on their own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours if needed, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day. • 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 immediately.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Nausea and vomiting may occur after your treatment and may last for 24 hours. It is usually mild to moderate. If you are vomiting and it is not controlled, you can quickly become dehydrated</p>	<p>You may be given a prescription for anti-nausea 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 liquids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Try the ideas in <i>Practical Tips to Manage Nausea</i>.* • Tell your healthcare team if nausea or vomiting continues or is not controlled with your anti-nausea drug(s).
<p>Skin rash may occur after treatment with gemcitabine. It is usually mild and is found on the arms, legs, chest, back or stomach. It may or may not be itchy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply hydrocortisone cream 0.5% sparingly 3-4 times daily. • If itching is very irritating, call your healthcare team. Otherwise, be sure to mention it at your next visit.
<p>Diarrhea may occur. If you have diarrhea and it is not controlled, you can quickly become dehydrated.</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 Choices to Help Manage Diarrhea</i>.* • Tell your healthcare team if you have diarrhea for more than 24 hours.
<p>Your white blood cells will decrease 1-2 weeks after your treatment. They usually return to normal within 1 week. 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. • Take care of your skin and mouth. • Avoid crowds and people who are sick. <p>Call your healthcare team immediately 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.</p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Your platelets may decrease 1-2 weeks after your treatment. They usually return to normal within 1 week. Platelets help to make your blood clot when you hurt yourself. You may bruise or bleed more easily than usual.	<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.
Swelling of hands, feet or lower legs may occur if your body retains extra fluid.	<p>If swelling is a problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate your feet when sitting. • Avoid tight clothing.
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 sometimes occurs with gemcitabine. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with gemcitabine. 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. • If hair loss is a problem, refer to <i>Resources for Hair Loss and Appearance Changes – Patient Handout</i>.*

*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 **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer); chills; cough; pain or burning when you pass urine.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black, tarry stools; blood in urine; pinpoint red spots on skin.

- Signs of an **allergic reaction** soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heartbeat, face swelling or breathing problems.
- Signs of **lung problems** such as shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- Signs of **heart problems** such as fast or uneven heartbeat.

CHECK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM 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 **kidney problems** such as lower back or side pain, swelling of feet or lower legs, numbness or tingling in feet or hands, blood in urine or cloudy urine.

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

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting, constipation or diarrhea.
- Easy bruising or bleeding.
- Redness, swelling, pain or sores where the needle was placed.
- Redness, swelling, pain or sores on your lips, tongue, mouth or throat.
- Skin rash with or without itching.
- Excessive drowsiness.
- Aches and pains.

REPORT ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS TO YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM
