



Provincial Health Services Authority

**For the Patient: Irinotecan**  
Other names: CAMPTOSAR®

- **Irinotecan** (eye-REEN-oh-TEE-can) 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 chemotherapy may be changed based on your test results and/or other side effects.
- Other drugs such as laxatives, seizure medicines, St. John's Wort, dexamethasone (DECADRON®), lopinavir-ritonavir (KALETRA®), and prochlorperazine (STEMETIL®) may **interact** with irinotecan.
  - Dexamethasone can be taken as an anti-nausea drug. Discuss with your cancer doctor if you are taking dexamethasone on a daily basis.
  - Prochlorperazine should not be taken as an anti-nausea drug on the day of your irinotecan treatment.
  - Tell your doctor if you are taking any other drugs as 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 irinotecan.
- Irinotecan may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with irinotecan. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.
- **Tell** your doctor, dentist, and other health professionals that you are being treated with irinotecan 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
<b>Pain or tenderness</b> may occur where the needle was placed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.</li> </ul>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Early diarrhea</b> may occur during or shortly after an irinotecan treatment (within 24 hours). It starts with watery eyes, stomach cramps and sweating. If you have diarrhea and it is not controlled, you can quickly become dehydrated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell your nurse or doctor <b>immediately</b> if you have watery eyes, stomach cramps, or sweating during or after your treatment.</li> <li>• Early diarrhea is treated with a medication called atropine, which is injected into a vein or under your skin. If your cancer centre is closed, your cancer doctor may tell you to go to your Hospital Emergency for atropine treatment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Late diarrhea</b> may occur one day to several days after an irinotecan treatment. It starts with stools more loose or often than usual. If you have diarrhea and it is not controlled, you can quickly become dehydrated.</p>	<p><b>Late diarrhea must be treated immediately with loperamide 2 mg tablets</b> (e.g., IMODIUM®):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take <b>TWO tablets</b> at the first sign of loose or more frequent stools than usual.</li> <li>• Then take <b>ONE tablet</b> every <b>TWO hours</b> until diarrhea has stopped for 12 hours.</li> <li>• At night, you may take <b>TWO tablets</b> every <b>FOUR hours</b> (set your alarm) during the time you usually sleep.</li> <li>• <b>This dose is much higher than the package directions. It is very important that you take this higher dose to stop the diarrhea.</b></li> <li>• Always keep a supply of loperamide (e.g., have 48 tablets on hand). You can buy loperamide at any pharmacy without a prescription.</li> </ul> <p>To help diarrhea:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink plenty of liquids.</li> <li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li> <li>• Avoid high fiber foods as outlined in <i>Food Choices to Help Manage Diarrhea</i>.*</li> <li>• A dietitian can give you more suggestions for dealing with diarrhea.</li> </ul> <p><b>Tell your healthcare team if diarrhea does not improve 24 hours after starting loperamide or lasts more than 36 hours.</b></p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Nausea and vomiting</b> may occur after your treatment and may last for 24 hours. If you are vomiting and it is not controlled, you can quickly become dehydrated</p>	<p>You will be given a prescription for anti-nausea drug(s) 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> <p>If nausea is a problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sip fluids throughout the day.</li> <li>• Nibble dry starchy foods (toast, cereal, crackers) often</li> <li>• Try the ideas in the <i>Practical Tips to Manage Nausea</i>.* </li></ul> <p>Tell your healthcare team if nausea or vomiting continues or is not controlled with your anti-nausea drug(s).</p>
<p><b>Constipation</b> may occur.</p>	<p>To help constipation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise if you can.</li> <li>• Drink plenty of fluids (8 cups a day).</li> <li>• Add prunes or prune juice.</li> <li>• Eat foods high in fibre such as bran, whole grain breads and cereals, nuts, fruits and vegetables.</li> <li>• Try ideas in <i>Food Choices to Manage Constipation</i>.* </li></ul>
<p>Your <b>white blood cells</b> will decrease 1 week after your treatment. They usually return to normal 3 weeks after your 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>• Take care of your skin and mouth.</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>Swelling</b> of hands, feet or lower legs may occur if your body retains extra fluid.</p>	<p>If swelling is a problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevate your feet when sitting.</li> </ul> <p>Avoid tight clothing.</p>
<p><b>Tiredness</b> and lack of energy may occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you are feeling tired.</li> </ul> <p>Try the ideas in <i>Fatigue/Tiredness – Patient Handout</i>.*</p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Sore mouth</b> may 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 soft, bland foods like puddings, milkshakes and cream soups.</li> <li>• Avoid spicy, crunchy or acidic food, and very hot or cold foods.</li> <li>• Try ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Try with a Sore Mouth</i>.*</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hair loss is common</b> and may begin within a few days or weeks of treatment. Your hair may thin or you may become totally bald. Your scalp may feel tender. You may lose hair on your face and body. Your hair will grow back once your treatments are over and sometimes between treatments. Colour and texture may change.</p>	<p>Refer to <i>Resources for Hair Loss and Appearance Changes – Patient Handout</i>.*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a gentle shampoo and soft brush.</li> <li>• Care should be taken with hair spray, bleaches, dyes and perms.</li> <li>• Protect your scalp with a hat, scarf or wig in cold weather.</li> <li>• Cover your head or apply sunblock on sunny days.</li> </ul> <p>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>Headaches</b> may occur. These are usually mild.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) to decrease or stop the headache.</li> </ul>
<p>You may have <b>trouble sleeping</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell your healthcare team if you continue to have trouble sleeping.</li> <li>• This will return to normal when you stop treatment with irinotecan.</li> </ul>

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

