



For the Patient: Melphalan injection
Other names: ALKERAN®

BC Cancer Agency

- Melphalan (MEL-fa-lan) is a drug that is used to treat many 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 melphalan or chlorambucil before taking melphalan.
- 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 cimetidine and digoxin (LANOXIN®) may **interact** with melphalan. 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 taking any new drugs.
- Talk to your doctor before receiving any **immunizations**.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of melphalan.
- Melphalan may cause **sterility** in men and **menopause** in women. If you plan to have children, discuss this with your doctor before being treated with melphalan.
- Melphalan may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with melphalan. 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 melphalan before you receive any treatment from them.

Changes in blood counts

Melphalan 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). • 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>Melphalan burns if it leaks under the skin.</p>	<p>Tell your nurse or doctor immediately if you feel burning, stinging, or any other change while the drug is being given.</p>
<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. Nausea and vomiting are more common with higher doses.</p>	<p>You will 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 closely the directions for the anti-nausea prescription.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of fluids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Try the ideas in <i>Food Choices to Help Control Nausea</i>.*
<p>Diarrhea may sometimes occur. Diarrhea is more common with higher doses.</p>	<p>To help diarrhea:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of fluids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Diarrhea During Chemotherapy</i>.*
<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>Tiredness and lack of energy may sometimes occur.</p>	<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>.*
<p>Hair loss sometimes occurs with melphalan. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with melphalan. Colour and texture may change. Hair loss is more common with higher doses</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.**

STOP TAKING MELPHALAN AND 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.
- Signs of **heart problems** such as fast or uneven heartbeat.
- **Seizures** or **loss of consciousness**.
- Signs of **low blood pressure** such as light-headedness, dizziness, or fainting.
- Signs of **lung problems** such as cough, shortness of breath, difficulty and/or change in breathing.

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 **kidney problems** such as lower back or side pain, swelling of feet or lower legs.
- Signs of **gout** such as joint pain.
- Signs of **bladder problems** such as changes in urination, painful burning sensation, presence of blood, or abdominal pain.
- **Sore throat** or **mouth** that makes it difficult to swallow comfortably.
- **Numbness** or **tingling** in feet or hands.

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

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, or diarrhea.
- Easy bruising or minor bleeding.
- 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
