



Provincial Health Services Authority

## For the Patient: Paclitaxel

Other names: TAXOL®

- **Paclitaxel** (pak'' li tax' el) 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 paclitaxel before receiving paclitaxel.
- 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 warfarin (COUMADIN®), disulfiram (ANTABUSE®) and metronidazole (FLAGYL®) may **interact** with paclitaxel. 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 paclitaxel.
- Paclitaxel may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with paclitaxel. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breastfeed during treatment.
- **Tell** doctors, dentists, and other health professionals that you are being treated with paclitaxel 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> commonly occur. Signs of an allergic reaction may include flushing, rash, dizziness, breathing problems, abdominal or back pain. This can occur immediately or several hours after receiving paclitaxel and usually only with the first or second dose.</p>	<p>Tell your nurse if this happens while you are receiving paclitaxel or contact your oncologist <b>immediately</b> if this happens after you leave the clinic.</p>
<p>Paclitaxel <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>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<b>Pain or tenderness</b> may occur where the needle was placed.	Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.
<b>Nausea and vomiting</b> may occur after your treatment.	You will be given a prescription for antinausea 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. <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 <a href="#">Practical Tips to Manage Nausea</a>.*</li> </ul>
<b>Muscle or joint pain</b> may commonly occur a few days after your treatment.	You may take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) for mild to moderate pain. Tell your doctor if the pain interferes with your activity.
<b>Fever</b> may sometimes occur shortly after treatment with paclitaxel. Fever should last no longer than 24 hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day.</li> <li>• Fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer) which occurs more than a few days after treatment may be a sign of an infection. Report this to your doctor <b>immediately</b>.</li> </ul>
Your <b>white blood cells</b> may decrease 10 to 12 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> .	To help prevent infection: <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 doctor <b>immediately</b> 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.</li> </ul>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Your <b>platelets</b> may decrease 8-9 days after your treatment. They usually return to normal before your next treatment. Platelets help to make your blood clot when you hurt yourself. <b>You may bruise or bleed more easily than usual.</b></p>	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try not to bruise, cut, or burn yourself.</li> <li>• Clean your nose by blowing gently. Do not pick your nose.</li> <li>• Avoid constipation.</li> <li>• Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily. Maintain good oral hygiene.</li> </ul> <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"> <li>• Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., <b>ASA for your heart</b>).</li> <li>• For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) first, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable.</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 <math>\frac{1}{4}</math> teaspoon baking soda AND <math>\frac{1}{4}</math> teaspoon salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in <a href="#">Food Ideas to Try with a Sore Mouth</a>.*</li> </ul>
<p><b>Diarrhea</b> may sometimes occur.</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 <a href="#">Food Choices to Help Manage Diarrhea</a>.*</li> </ul>
<p><b>Constipation</b> may sometimes occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise if you can.</li> <li>• Drink plenty of fluids.</li> <li>• Try ideas in <a href="#">Food Choices to Manage Constipation</a>.*</li> </ul>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<b>Tiredness</b> and lack of energy may commonly occur.	<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 <a href="#">Fatigue/Tiredness – Patient Handout</a>.*</li> </ul>
<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. Hair will grow back once your treatments are over and sometimes between treatments. Colour and texture may change.	<p><a href="#">Refer to Resources for Hair Loss and Appearance Changes – Patient Handout</a>.*</p> <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>
<b>Numbness or tingling of the fingers or toes</b> may commonly occur. This will slowly return to normal once your treatments are over. This may take several months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be careful when handling items that are sharp, hot, or cold.</li> <li>Tell your doctor at your next visit, especially if you have trouble with buttons, writing, or picking up small objects.</li> </ul>
<b>Skin rashes</b> may sometimes occur.	If itching is very irritating, call your doctor. Otherwise, be sure to mention it at your next visit.
<b>Loss of appetite</b> may occur.	<a href="#">Try the ideas in Food Ideas to Help with Decreased Appetite</a> .*
<b>Swelling</b> of hands, feet, or lower legs may sometimes occur if your body retains extra fluid.	<p>If swelling is a problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elevate your feet when sitting.</li> <li>Avoid tight clothing.</li> </ul>

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

### 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, abdominal pain or breathing problems.
- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C 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 a **blood clot** such as tenderness or hardness over a vein, calf swelling and tenderness, sudden onset of cough, chest pain, or shortness of breath.
- Signs of **heart or lung problems** such as fast or uneven heartbeat, chest pain, chest pressure, shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, swelling of feet or lower legs, or fainting.

