



Provincial Health Services Authority

For the Patient: Pemetrexed
Other names: ALIMTA®

- **Pemetrexed** (pem-eh-TREX-ed) 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 the test results and/or other side effects.
- Other drugs, such as ibuprofen (ADVIL®), may **interact** with pemetrexed. Tell your doctor if you are taking this or any other drugs as you may need extra blood tests, your dose may need to be changed or the drug(s) may need to be held for a few days. 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 pemetrexed.
- Pemetrexed may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with pemetrexed and for 3 months afterward. 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 pemetrexed before you receive any treatment from them.
- You will be given a **Vitamin B12 injection** approximately 1 week before your first treatment, and then every 9 weeks until 3 weeks after your last treatment. This will help decrease your chance of developing side effects from pemetrexed.
- You need to take a **folic acid** supplement every day to decrease your chance of developing side effects. Ask your community pharmacist for help choosing a supplement that contains 400 mcg of folic acid. Start taking it 1 week before your first treatment and keep taking it every day until 3 weeks after your last treatment. If you **miss a dose** of folic acid, 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, skip the missed dose and go back to your usual dosing times.
- You will be given a prescription for **dexamethasone** (e.g., DECADRON®, DEXASONE®, HEXADROL®). Dexamethasone helps prevent a rash that is very common with pemetrexed.
 - Start taking the dexamethasone twice daily starting the day before your treatment and ending the day after treatment (3 days total).

- It is important to take the dexamethasone exactly as directed. If you forget to take any of the doses, be sure to tell your doctor or nurse before you receive pemetrexed.
- Always take dexamethasone with food.

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.	Apply cool compresses or soak in cool/warm water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.
Nausea and vomiting may occur after your treatment. Most people have little or no nausea.	You may be given a prescription for antinausea 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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of fluids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Try the ideas in Practical Tips to Manage Nausea.*
Skin rashes may sometimes occur.	You will be given dexamethasone, a steroid which will help decrease your chance of having a rash. A mild rash may still occur. To help itching: <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.
Diarrhea may sometimes occur.	To help diarrhea: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of fluids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in Food Choices to Help Manage Diarrhea.*

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Your white blood cells may decrease a few days after your treatment. They usually return to normal about 2 weeks after your last treatment. 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.
<p>Your platelets may decrease a few days after your treatment. They usually return to normal about 2 weeks after your last treatment. Platelets help to make your blood clot when you hurt yourself. You may bruise or bleed more easily than usual.</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.
<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.</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 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon baking soda AND $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day. • Try the ideas in Food Ideas to Try with a Sore Mouth.*
<p>Loss of appetite and weight loss may sometimes occur and may persist after discontinuation of pemetrexed.</p>	<p>Try the ideas in Food Ideas to Help with Decreased Appetite.*</p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Tiredness and lack of energy may sometimes 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> OR <i>Your Bank to Energy Savings: Helping People with Cancer Handle Fatigue</i>.*
Hair loss is rare with pemetrexed. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with pemetrexed. 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.**

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; 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 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 an **allergic reaction** (rare) soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling, or breathing problems.

SEE YOUR DOCTOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of **lung problems** such as shortness of breath, wheezing or coughing.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Skin rash or itching.**

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

- Numbness or tingling** in feet or hands.
- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation.
- Easy bruising or minor bleeding.
- Redness, swelling, pain or sores on your lips, tongue, mouth, or throat.

REPORT ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS TO YOUR DOCTOR
