



For the Patient: **Thalidomide**

Other names: THALOMID®

BC Cancer Agency

- **Thalidomide** (tha-LI-doe-mide) is a drug that is used to treat multiple myeloma and other types of cancer. It is a capsule that you take by mouth. The capsule contains lactose.
- If you are a woman and are able to bear children, a **blood test** to determine whether you are pregnant will be taken before starting thalidomide treatment, and then repeated every four weeks.
- Thalidomide may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. Severe birth defects or death to the unborn baby may occur. Even a single dose can cause birth defects. Thalidomide should **never** be used by females who are pregnant. **Two** forms of **birth control** must be used if there is ANY chance that you may become pregnant while being treated with thalidomide. Tell your doctor right away if you become pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.
- **Men** who are taking thalidomide must use a **condom** every time they have sex with a female partner who is able to bear children. This is because it is not known if the drug is present in semen. Tell your doctor right away if your partner becomes pregnant.
- It is important to **take** thalidomide exactly as directed by your doctor. Make sure you understand the directions. Thalidomide should be taken with water, preferably at least one hour after meals.
- If you **vomit** after taking thalidomide, do not take a second dose. Call your doctor the next morning/during office hours for advice.
- If you **miss a dose** of thalidomide, take it as soon as you can. If your next dose is nearly due, skip the missed dose and go back to your usual dosing times. Call your doctor (during office hours) to ask about making up the missed dose.
- **Store** thalidomide capsules out of the reach of children, at room temperature, away from heat, light and moisture.
- Tell your doctor if you are taking **any 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 thalidomide.
- ***Tell*** doctors or dentists that you are being treated with thalidomide 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>Nausea may occur during treatment. Most people have little or no nausea.</p>	<p>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>Food Choices to Control Nausea</i>.*
<p>Constipation may occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise if you can. • Drink plenty of fluids. • Try ideas in <i>Suggestions for Dealing with Constipation</i>. *
<p>Your white blood cells may decrease during your 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. • Take care of your skin and mouth. • Avoid crowds and people who are sick. • Stop taking thalidomide and call your doctor <i>immediately</i> 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>Headache may occur.</p>	<p>Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours if needed, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day.</p>
<p>Sugar control may be affected in diabetics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check your blood sugar regularly if you are diabetic.
<p>Swelling 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"> • Elevate your feet when sitting. • Avoid tight clothing.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Sleepiness and lack of energy may occur.	If sleepiness and lack of energy are a problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid alcohol. • Do not drive a car or operate machinery. • Try the ideas in <i>Your Bank of Energy Savings: How People with Cancer Can Handle Fatigue</i>.*
Numbness or tingling of the fingers or toes may occur. This usually will slowly return to normal once your treatments are over. This may take several months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be careful when handling items that are sharp, hot, or cold. • Tell your doctor at your next visit, especially if you have trouble with buttons, writing, or picking up small objects.
Blood clots may rarely occur, usually in the leg. This is more likely to happen if you have had blood clots before. Signs to watch for include tenderness or hardness over a vein, calf tenderness, sudden onset of cough, chest pain, or shortness of breath.	Tell your doctor if you have ever had treatment for a blood clot. To help prevent blood clots: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep active. • Drink plenty of fluids. • Avoid tight clothing. • Do not sit with your legs crossed at the knees for long periods of time.

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

STOP TAKING THALIDOMIDE 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); chills; cough; pain or burning when you pass urine.
- 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.
- 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.

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

- **Unprotected sex** or forget to use **birth control** during treatment with thalidomide.
- **Skin rash** or **itching**.
- Ringing in your ears or **hearing problems**.

