

Breast Cancer

Drug: Trastuzumab (Herceptin)

The aim of this leaflet is to help to inform you, and those that are close to you, about the side effects that may occur with this treatment.

Your treatment			
Day	Drug(s)	How is it given?	How long will it take?
1	Trastuzumab (<i>tras-too-zoo-mab</i>)	By a drip into a vein	90 minutes

- this treatment cycle is repeated every 21 days for 17 cycles
- tell your doctor if you have high blood pressure or a history of heart disease
- your doctor will ask you to have some tests to check that your heart is working normally and these may be repeated at different times during the course of your treatment

Important Information

Do **NOT** stop taking any prescribed medicines (including low dose aspirin) without first speaking to your doctor.

During treatment let your nurse know immediately if you develop :-

- skin rash, itching, fever, shivers, dizziness, breathlessness or any other symptoms

If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment and the side effects, please contact your treating team

Daytime contact.....

After hours contact.....

Side Effects

Below is a list of some of the possible side effects of this treatment and when they are likely to occur. This is a guide only. Remember most of these side effects are temporary and can be managed. Some people have few side effects while others might have many, everyone is different. If you are unsure about any of your symptoms, contact your doctor or nurse.

Immediate (onset hours to days)

Allergic Reaction

Allergic reactions are uncommon but can be life threatening. You may experience skin rash, itching, fever, shiver, shakes, redness of the face, pain, dizziness, feeling anxious, wheezing and shortness of breath. If you have any of these symptoms tell your nurse or doctor **without delay**.

Flu-like Symptoms

Fevers, chills, muscle pain and headaches can occur. You may feel like you have the flu. If these symptoms do not improve, tell your doctor or nurse.

Headache

A mild headache can occur with this treatment. This can be treated with paracetamol tablets. If you develop a severe headache, go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

Early (onset days to weeks)

Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea can occur with this treatment and may happen at any time. This can usually be managed by ensuring you have adequate fluid intake and taking loperamide (Gastrostop®) or other anti-diarrhoeal medication as required. You should, however, report what happened to your doctor or nurse at the next appointment. If your diarrhoea is not controlled and you have more than 5 loose bowel motions per day, and especially if you feel light-headed or dizzy, you should go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

Feeling Tired

Fatigue is common. If you do feel tired, you may need to limit your activities and concentrate on what is most important to you. However, regular exercise each day, along with plenty of rest, has been shown to help improve fatigue.

Delayed (onset months to years)

Changes in the way your heart works

Trastuzumab (Herceptin®) sometimes causes a weakening of the heart muscle. However, this is uncommon. You have a higher risk if you have had high blood pressure, chemotherapy with an anthracycline or radiotherapy to your chest. You will be asked to have a test to see how your heart is working before and during treatment with trastuzumab (Herceptin®). Weakening of the heart muscle causes shortness of breath and sometimes swelling of the ankles. If you develop these symptoms, go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will treatment affect my sex life?

The desire to have sex may decrease because you may become tired, anxious or unwell during treatment. It may help to discuss your worries with your partner and/or doctor or nurse.

Do I still need to use contraception?

Yes. It is still possible to fall pregnant or father a child. Pregnancy should be avoided as it is unknown whether this treatment is harmful to an unborn baby. Talk to your doctor about suitable contraception methods.

Can I still breast feed?

It is recommended that you do not breast feed during the entire course of your treatment.

Is it safe to take medicines, vitamins and/or herbal preparations during my treatment?

Before starting any medicines, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, natural or herbal therapies, tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. Some of these medicines may interact with your treatment.

What can I take for a headache or mild pain?

Paracetamol is safe to take if you have a headache or other mild aches and pains. It is recommended that you avoid taking aspirin, ibuprofen and other anti-inflammatory type medications for pain. If these medications have been prescribed by your doctor, do not stop taking them without first speaking with your doctor.

Should I be on a special diet while having treatment?

While you are receiving this treatment it is important that you try and maintain a healthy diet. If you have any concerns about recent weight loss or weight gain or questions about your diet, please ask to speak to a dietitian.

Can I still drink alcohol?

It is fine to drink 1 to 2 standard drinks a day with most cancer treatments. In some cases alcohol can interfere with the way some cancer treatments work. Your doctors and nurses giving the treatment will be able to give you specific advice about whether drinking alcohol is safe with your treatment.

Can I have a vaccination?

Vaccination such as flu and tetanus are safe to receive while you are having treatment. Live vaccines (for you and your children) should be postponed until at least 6 months after treatment. If in doubt, check with your doctor before having any vaccinations.

Useful links and resources

Telephone support

- Call Cancer Council on 13 11 20 for cancer information and support

Breast cancer information

- Australian Lymphology Association – www.lymphoedema.org.au
- Australasian Menopause Society – www.menopause.org.au
- Breast Cancer Network Australia – www.bcna.org.au
- National Breast Cancer Foundation – www.nbcf.org.au

General cancer information and support

- Beyond blue – www.beyondblue.org.au
- Cancer Australia – www.canceraustralia.gov.au
- Cancer Council Australia – www.cancer.org.au
- Cancer Voices Australia – www.cancervoicesaustralia.org
- Canteen – www.canteen.org.au
- Carers Australia – www.carersaustralia.com.au
- eviQ Cancer Treatments Online: Patients and carers homepage – www.eviq.org.au/Category/tabid/65/categoryid/64/Default.aspx
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand: Listeria & Food Safety – www.foodstandards.gov.au/publications/pages/listeriabrochuretext.aspx
- Look Good Feel Better – www.lgfb.org.au
- RedKite – www.redkite.org.au

Quit smoking information and support

Quitting smoking is helpful even after you have been diagnosed with cancer. The following resources provide useful information and support to help you quit smoking. Talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about any other questions you may have.

- Call Quitline on 13 QUIT (13 78 48)
- iCanQuit – www.iCanQuit.com.au
- Quitnow – www.quitnow.gov.au

Disclaimer: This document reflects what is currently regarded as safe practice. However, as in any patient's situation there may be factors which cannot be covered by a single set of guidelines. This document does not replace the need for the application of medical judgment to each individual case. Some of the side effects from cancer treatment may only become evident after a long period of time, but many of these can be avoided with careful monitoring. Generally, the benefits of your treatment should outweigh the risks. Your doctor will discuss the specific risks of your treatment with you. Contact your cancer clinic staff or doctor if you feel your symptoms are getting worse or you are not able to manage them.

The currency of this information is guaranteed only up until the date of printing, for any updates please check www.eviq.org.au

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