

Cytarabine

About This Medicine

Cytarabine is used to treat cancer. It is given in the vein (IV), as an injection under the skin (subcutaneously), and as an injection into the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord (intrathecal).

Possible Side Effects

- Bone marrow suppression. This is a decrease in the number of white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets. This may raise your risk of infection, make you tired and weak, and raise your risk of bleeding.
- Soreness of the mouth and throat. You may have red areas, white patches, or sores that hurt.
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up)
- Diarrhea (loose bowel movements)
- Anal sores or inflammation (swelling)
- Decreased appetite (decreased hunger)
- Pain or swelling at injection site
- Abnormal bleeding – symptoms may be coughing up blood, throwing up blood (may look like coffee grounds), red or black tarry bowel movements, abnormally heavy menstrual flow, nosebleeds, or any other unusual bleeding.
- Blood clots in your arms and/or legs
- Risk of severe and life-threatening infections
- Fever
- Rash
- Changes in your liver function

Note: All possible side effects are not included. Your side effects may be different depending on your cancer diagnosis, condition, or if you are receiving other medicines in combination. Please discuss any concerns or questions with your medical team.

Warnings and Precautions

- Severe bone marrow suppression, which can be life-threatening.
- Changes in your central nervous system can happen which can be life-threatening. The central nervous system is made up of your brain and spinal cord. You could experience personality

changes, feel extreme tiredness, agitation, confusion, and coma. **If you start to have any of these symptoms let your doctor know right away.**

- Inflammation in the colon and other severe gastrointestinal complications which can be life-threatening. Symptoms may be diarrhea, stomach cramping, and sometimes blood in the bowel movements.
- Inflammation of the lungs which can be life-threatening. You may have a dry cough or trouble breathing.
- Eye irritation. You may have watery eyes. Your eyes and eye lids may become red and painful. This may happen when cytarabine is given at high doses.
- Severe allergic skin reaction. You may develop blisters on your skin that are filled with fluid or a severe red rash all over your body that may be painful.
- Hair loss. Hair loss is often temporary, although with certain medicine, hair loss can sometimes be permanent. Hair loss may happen suddenly or gradually. If you lose hair, you may lose it from your head, face, armpits, pubic area, chest, and/or legs. You may also notice your hair getting thin.
- Tumor lysis syndrome: This medicine may act on the cancer cells very quickly. This may affect how your kidneys work.
- Inflammation of your pancreas
- A syndrome can happen 6-12 hours after you get this medicine causing fever, muscle and bone pain, chest pain, a raised red rash, eye inflammation and irritation. If you get any of these symptoms let your doctor and/or nurse right away.
- These side effects may be more severe if you are receiving high doses of this medicine.

Note: Some of the side effects above are very rare. If you have concerns and/or questions, please discuss them with your medical team.

Important Information

- Cytotoxic medicines leave the body through urine and stool, but they can also be present in other body fluids such as blood, vomit, semen, and vaginal fluids. Take precautions to prevent others from coming in contact with your medicine or your body fluids. Follow safety precautions during your treatment and for as long as directed by your health care provider after your treatment. If you take a cytotoxic pill each day, follow these precautions every day.
- If you are getting this medicine by injection into the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord (intrathecal), your side effects might be different than those listed above. Please talk to your doctor about side effects to expect.

Treating Side Effects

- Manage tiredness by pacing your activities for the day.
- Be sure to include periods of rest between energy-draining activities.
- To decrease the risk of infection, wash your hands regularly.
- Avoid close contact with people who have a cold, the flu, or other infections.
- Take your temperature as your doctor or nurse tells you, and whenever you feel like you may have a fever.



- To help decrease the risk of bleeding, use a soft toothbrush. Check with your nurse before using dental floss.
- Be very careful when using knives or tools.
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor.
- Drink enough fluids to keep your urine pale yellow.
- If you throw up or have diarrhea, you should drink more fluids so that you do not become dehydrated (lack of water in the body from losing too much fluid).
- To help with nausea and vomiting, eat small, frequent meals instead of three large meals a day. Choose foods and drinks that are at room temperature. Ask your nurse or doctor about other helpful tips and medicine that is available to help stop or lessen these symptoms.
- If you have diarrhea, eat low-fiber foods that are high in protein and calories and avoid foods that can irritate your digestive tracts or lead to cramping.
- Ask your nurse or doctor about medicine that can lessen or stop your diarrhea.
- Mouth care is very important. Your mouth care should consist of routine, gentle cleaning of your teeth or dentures and rinsing your mouth with a mixture of 1/2 teaspoon of salt in 8 ounces of water or 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda in 8 ounces of water. This should be done at least after each meal and at bedtime.
- If you have mouth sores, avoid mouthwash that has alcohol. Also avoid alcohol and smoking because they can bother your mouth and throat.
- To help with decreased appetite, eat small, frequent meals. Eat foods high in calories and protein, such as meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, tofu, eggs, nuts, milk, yogurt, cheese, ice cream, pudding, and nutritional supplements.
- Consider using sauces and spices to increase taste. Daily exercise, with your doctor's approval, may increase your appetite.
- If you get a rash do not put anything on it unless your doctor or nurse says you may. Keep the area around the rash clean and dry. Ask your doctor for medicine if your rash bothers you.
- To help with hair loss, wash with a mild shampoo and avoid washing your hair every day. Avoid coloring your hair.
- Avoid rubbing your scalp, pat your hair or scalp dry.
- Limit your use of hair spray, electric curlers, blow dryers, and curling irons.
- If you are interested in getting a wig, talk to your nurse and they can help you get in touch with programs in your local area.

Food and Medicine Interactions

- There are no known interactions of cytarabine with food.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist about all other prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements (vitamins, minerals, herbs, and others) you are taking before starting this medicine as there are known medicine interactions with cytarabine. Also, check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new prescription or over-the-counter medicines, or dietary supplements to make sure that there are no interactions.

When to Call the Doctor



Call your doctor or nurse if you have any of these symptoms and/or any new or unusual symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher
- Chills
- Pain in your chest
- Dry cough
- Wheezing and/or trouble breathing
- Tiredness that interferes with your daily activities
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Easy bleeding or bruising
- Signs of abnormal bleeding such as coughing up blood, throwing up blood (may look like coffee grounds), red or black tarry bowel movements, abnormally heavy menstrual flow, nosebleeds, or any other unusual bleeding
- Extreme tiredness, personality changes, confusion, or agitation
- Blurry vision or changes in your eyesight
- Red, painful, teary, or crusty eyes
- Flu-like symptoms: fever, headache, muscle and joint aches, and tiredness
- Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking and/or is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Throwing up more than 3 times a day
- Pain in your mouth or throat that makes it hard to eat or drink
- Anal pain, sores or swelling
- Severe pain in your abdomen that may spread to your back
- Diarrhea, 4 times in one day or diarrhea with lack of strength or a feeling of being dizzy
- Lasting loss of appetite or rapid weight loss of five pounds in a week
- A new rash and/or itching or a rash that is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Your leg is swollen, red, warm and/or painful
- Bone and/or muscle pain that does not go away, or is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Pain or swelling at the injection site
- Signs of infection: fever or chills, cough, trouble breathing, severe pain in your abdomen, difficulty urinating, burning or pain when you pass urine, redness and/or swelling of the skin
- Signs of tumor lysis: confusion or agitation, decreased urine, nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, muscle cramping, numbness and/or tingling, seizures
- Signs of possible liver problems: dark urine, pale bowel movements, pain in your abdomen, feeling very tired and weak, unusual itching, or yellowing of the eyes or skin
- If you think you may be pregnant

Reproduction Warnings

- **Pregnancy warning:** This medicine can have harmful effects on the unborn baby. For this reason, be sure to talk with your doctor if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant while receiving this medicine. Let your doctor know right away if you think you may be pregnant.
- **Breastfeeding warning:** It is not known if this medicine passes into breast milk. For this reason, women should talk to their doctor about the risks and benefits of breastfeeding during treatment



with this medicine because this medicine may enter the breast milk and cause harm to a breastfeeding baby.

- **Fertility warning:** In men and women both, this medicine may affect your ability to have children in the future. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you plan to have children. Ask for information on sperm or egg banking.

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