Doxorubicin (Adriamycin®)

About This Drug

Doxorubicin is used to treat cancer. It is given in the vein (IV).

Possible Side Effects

- Bone marrow depression. 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 (fatigue), and raise your risk of bleeding.
- Fever in the setting of decreased white blood cells, which is a serious condition that can be life-threatening
- Tiredness and weakness
- General discomfort, a feeling of being unwell
- Blurred vision or other changes in eyesight
- 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.
- Changes in your nail color, nail loss and/or brittle nail
- Nausea and throwing up (vomiting)
- Loose bowel movements (diarrhea)
- Decreased appetite (decreased hunger)
- Soreness of the mouth and throat. You may have red areas, white patches, or sores that hurt.
- Pain in your abdomen
- Allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis are rare but may happen in some patients. Signs of allergic reaction to this drug may be swelling of the face, feeling like your tongue or throat are swelling, trouble breathing, rash, itching, fever, chills, feeling dizzy, and/or feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way. If this happens, do not take another dose of this drug. You should get urgent medical treatment.
- In women, menstrual bleeding may become irregular or stop while you are getting this drug. Do not assume that you cannot become pregnant if you do not have a menstrual period.
- Women may go through signs of menopause (change of life) like vaginal dryness or itching.

Note: Not all possible side effects are included above.
Warnings and Precautions

- Skin and tissue irritation including redness, pain, warmth, or swelling at the IV site if the drug leaks out of the vein and into nearby tissue. Very rarely it may cause tissue necrosis (death).
- Changes in the tissue of the heart and/or congestive heart failure. You may be short of breath. Your arms, hands, legs and feet may swell.
- This drug may raise your risk of getting a second cancer, such as leukemia and myelodysplastic syndrome
- Severe bone marrow depression

*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

- This drug may be present in the saliva, tears, sweat, urine, stool, vomit, semen, and vaginal secretions. Talk to your doctor and/or your nurse about the necessary precautions to take during this time.
- Talk to your doctor before receiving any vaccinations during your treatment. Some vaccinations are not recommended while receiving doxorubicin.
- Urine color may be slightly orange or reddish starting several hours after you get this drug. This will slowly go away within one to two days.

Treating Side Effects

- To help with hair loss, wash with a mild shampoo and avoid washing your hair every day.
- Avoid rubbing your scalp, pat your hair or scalp dry.
- Avoid coloring your hair.
- 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. You can also call the American Cancer Society at 800-ACS-2345 to find out information about the “Look Good, Feel Better” program close to where you live. It is a free program where women getting chemotherapy can learn about wigs, turbans and scarves as well as makeup techniques and skin and nail care.
- Keeping your nails moisturized may help with brittleness.
- Drink plenty of fluids (a minimum of eight glasses per day is recommended).
- If you throw up or have loose bowel movements, you should drink more fluids so that you do not become dehydrated (lack water in the body from losing too much fluid).
- If you get 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.
- 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 or stop lessen these symptoms.
• 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 high caloric food such as pudding, ice cream, yogurt and milkshakes.
• Keeping your pain under control is important to your well-being. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you are experiencing pain.
• Manage tiredness by pacing your activities for the day.
• Be sure to include periods of rest between energy-draining activities.
• To decrease 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 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.
• To help with possible signs of early menopause, vaginal lubricants can be used to lessen vaginal dryness, itching, and pain during sexual relations.

Food and Drug Interactions

• There are no known interactions of doxorubicin with food.
• This drug may interact with other medicines. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the prescription and over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements (vitamins, minerals, herbs and others) that you are taking at this time. The safety and use of dietary supplements and alternative diets are often not known. Using these might affect your cancer or interfere with your treatment. Until more is known, you should not use dietary supplements or alternative diets without your cancer doctor's help.

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 100.5 F (38 C) or higher
• Chills
• Trouble breathing
• Fatigue that interferes with your daily activities
• Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
• Easy bleeding or bruising
• Swelling of legs, ankles, or feet
• Weight gain of 5 pounds in one week (fluid retention)
• Blurred vision or other changes in eyesight
• Loose bowel movements (diarrhea) 4 times a day or loose bowel movements with lack of strength or a feeling of being dizzy
• Pain in your mouth or throat that makes it hard to eat or drink
• Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking and/or is not relieved by prescribed medicines
• Throwing up more than 3 times a day
• Lasting loss of appetite or rapid weight loss of five pounds in a week
• Signs of allergic reaction: swelling of the face, feeling like your tongue or throat are swelling, trouble breathing, rash, itching, fever, chills, feeling dizzy, and/or feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way
• While you are getting this drug, please tell your nurse right away if you have any pain, redness, or swelling at the site of the IV infusion
• If you think you may be pregnant or may have impregnated your partner

Reproduction Warnings

• Pregnancy warning: This drug can have harmful effects on the unborn baby. Women of child bearing potential and men with female partners of child bearing potential should use effective methods of birth control during your cancer treatment. Let your doctor know right away if you think you may be pregnant or may have impregnated your partner
• Breastfeeding warning: Women should not breast feed during treatment because this drug could enter the breast milk and cause harm to a breastfeeding baby. Women should talk to their doctor about the risks and benefits of breastfeeding during treatment with this drug.
• Fertility warning: In men and women both, this drug 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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