



Paclitaxel

Other Names: **(Taxol®)**

About This Drug

Paclitaxel is a drug used to treat cancer. This drug is given in the vein (IV).

Possible Side Effects

- 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.
- Swelling of your legs, ankles and/or feet (edema)
- Flushing
- Nausea and throwing up (vomiting)
- Loose bowel movements (diarrhea)
- 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.
- Effects on the nerves are called peripheral neuropathy. You may feel numbness, tingling, or pain in your hands and feet. It may be hard for you to button your clothes, open jars, or walk as usual. The effect on the nerves may get worse with more doses of the drug. These effects get better in some people after the drug is stopped but it does not get better in all people.
- Changes in your liver function. Your liver function will be checked as needed.
- Bone, joint and muscle pain
- Abnormal EKG
- Allergic reaction: 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.
- Infection
- Changes in your kidney function. Your kidney function will be checked as needed.

Note: Each of the side effects above was reported in 20% or greater of patients treated with paclitaxel. Not all possible side effects are included above.

Warnings and Precautions

- Severe allergic reactions
- Severe bone marrow depression

Treating Side Effects

- To help with hair loss, wash with a mild shampoo and avoid washing your hair every day.
- Avoid rubbing your scalp, instead, 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.
- Ask your doctor or nurse about medicines that are available to help stop or lessen diarrhea and/or nausea.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 ½ 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.
- Drink plenty of fluids (a minimum of eight glasses per day is recommended).
- Take your temperature as your doctor or nurse tells you, and whenever you feel like you may have a fever.
- Talk to your doctor or nurse about precautions you can take to avoid infections and bleeding.
- Be careful when cooking, walking, and handling sharp objects and hot liquids.

Food and Drug Interactions

- There are no known interactions of paclitaxel with food.
- This drug may interact with other medicines. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the 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 the following symptoms and/or any new or unusual symptoms:

- Fever of 100.5 F (38 C) or above
- Chills

- Redness, pain, warmth, or swelling at the IV site during the infusion
- 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
- Feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way (palpitations)
- Weight gain of 5 pounds in one week (fluid retention)
- Decreased urine or very dark urine
- Signs of liver problems: dark urine, pale bowel movements, bad stomach pain, feeling very tired and weak, unusual itching, or yellowing of the eyes or skin
- Heavy menstrual period that lasts longer than normal
- Easy bruising or bleeding
- Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking, and/or that is not relieved by prescribed medicines.
- Loose bowel movements (diarrhea) more than 4 times a day or diarrhea with weakness or lightheadedness
- Pain in your mouth or throat that makes it hard to eat or drink
- Lasting loss of appetite or rapid weight loss of five pounds in a week
- Signs of peripheral neuropathy: numbness, tingling, or decreased feeling in fingers or toes; trouble walking or changes in the way you walk; or feeling clumsy when buttoning clothes, opening jars, or other routine activities
- Joint and muscle pain that is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Extreme fatigue that interferes with normal activities
- 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 are pregnant.

Reproduction Warnings

- **Pregnancy warning:** This drug may have harmful effects on the unborn child, it is recommended that effective methods of birth control should be used during your cancer treatment. Let your doctor know right away if you think you may be pregnant.
- **Breast feeding warning:** Women should not breast feed during treatment because this drug could enter the breast milk and cause harm to a breast feeding baby.

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