

Patient Information Sheet



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Head & Neck, Larynx, Cisplatin with radiotherapy About This Protocol

This treatment uses one chemotherapy drug called **cisplatin**, it is being used along with the radiotherapy, combining the two treatments has been shown to be more effective.

The cisplatin is given on one day of weeks 1, 4 and 7 of the radiotherapy treatment, often this requires you to stay in hospital overnight. Before each dose of cisplatin your doctor will assess if you are well enough to be given it.

This treatment can cause you to develop a very sore mouth and throat, it is important to follow all instructions you are given about how to look after your mouth.

It is a good idea to have seen a dietician and a dentist before starting this treatment.

Remember:

- Do regular mouth care
- Tell your nurse or doctor if you are finding it difficult to eat or drink

Temperature

Never ignore a temperature of 38 degrees C or above, or if you develop rigors (shivers and shakes) go straight to your nearest hospital.

Side Effects

This treatment can cause the following side effects. Remember, most of these side effects are temporary and can be treated. If you develop side effects and are unsure as to whether your symptoms need urgent treatment, contact your doctor or nurse for telephone advice.

Daytime Contact: _____

After hours Contact: _____

Possible side effects include:

Increased risk of infection Your white blood cells can become low, white blood cells help fight infection. This is most common 7-10 days after treatment. Contact your hospital straight away if you develop a high temperature, shivering, flu-like symptoms or other signs of infection such as a sore throat or cough. You will need to have a blood test before having your next treatment to check that your blood count has returned to normal. If your count is still low it may be necessary to delay your next treatment.

If you feel unwell, develop chills, shivers, shakes or a temperature of 38°C go to your nearest hospital emergency department. Do not delay.

Sore Mouth The treatment may cause the lining of the mouth and throat to become sore, sometimes ulcerated (small sores) and prone to infection. To help prevent this from happening rinse your mouth after each meal and before going to bed with a saline or sodium bicarbonate mouthwash. **Dissolve 1 teaspoon of sodium bicarbonate or salt in a glass of warm water.** Clean your teeth using a soft toothbrush and check your mouth every time you clean your teeth for ulcers or white coating on your tongue (thrush). Let your doctor or nurse know if you develop a sore painful mouth, pain on swallowing or develop a white coating on your tongue.

Nausea and Vomiting This treatment may cause nausea and vomiting. You will be given anti-sickness medications to prevent this. If you continue to feel or be sick, contact your doctor or nurse because your anti-sickness medication may need to be changed or increased.

Changes in appetite This treatment may cause you to not feel like eating. Try to eat small meals or snacks throughout the day instead of three large meals. Ask to speak to a dietician about taking high protein and high energy supplements. These are usually liquids or puddings.

Dry mouth may be caused by the radiation therapy. Saliva substitutes can be helpful in relieving the symptoms as well as chewing gum and alcohol free mouth washes. Increase your fluid intake and try to avoid eating dry foods that need a lot of saliva to chew and digest (eg bread, toast, steak, crisps). It is important to avoid alcohol and smoking as these may worsen the symptoms. It is also important to have seen a dentist before starting this treatment and to inspect your mouth regularly for signs of problems like pain tenderness or burning sensation in your mouth. Dry mouth can persist for some time after completing radiotherapy, so you should see your Dentist regularly (eg every 6 months) after treatment finishes

Feeling tired Fatigue 'feeling tired' is a common side effect of treatment. If you do feel tired limit your activities, do only what is most important to you. Gentle exercise each day along with plenty of rest has been shown to help improve fatigue. Your doctor or nurse can give you advice about other ways to help you manage your fatigue.

Changes in Hearing This treatment may cause ringing in the ears. You may also lose the ability to hear high pitched sounds. In most cases these side effects are temporary. Please let your doctor know if you develop any symptoms relating to your hearing.

Anaemia (low red blood cells) The red blood cells carry a protein called haemoglobin (Hb), which carries oxygen around your body. If your haemoglobin is low you may appear pale and feel more tired than usual. If you feel light-headed, dizzy, short of breath let your doctor or nurse know.

Radiation dermatitis. The skin may become very red, moist and flaky. This is usually confined to the skin folds and creases. If this occurs discuss with your radiation oncologist.

Changes to kidney function Before each treatment you will have a blood test to check that your kidneys are working. It is important to drink more than normal on the day of your treatment. If you are not able to drink or if you are not passing as much urine as normal let your doctor or nurse know.

Changes to Sensation If you develop numbness, tingling, pins and needles in your hands and/or feet it is important to let your doctor or nurse know. This is an early sign of nerve damage caused by one of the drugs you are having. Your treatment may need to be changed.

Hair loss The drugs you are having can cause your hair to become dry and brittle, you may also have some hair loss or thinning. Your hair will grow back once your treatment has finished. To care for your hair use a soft hair brush and a gentle shampoo. Do not use dyes, perms or hot hair dryers. Ask the staff about the 'Look Good Feel Better program' for women and men www.lgfb.org.au/

Low Magnesium can occur with this treatment, it will be monitored and treated if needed.

Sexual and fertility issues This treatment may cause changes to your fertility, so it is important that you and your partner discuss this risk with your doctor before treatment.

During treatment it is not advisable to become pregnant or father a child, as chemotherapy drugs can have a harmful effect on an unborn child. It is important to use an effective birth control method throughout treatment. Using a condom during the time that you are receiving chemotherapy, and in the 7 days after you have completed chemotherapy, will protect your partner from being exposed to chemotherapy drugs that may be present in your body fluids.

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

For Women: You may experience hot flushes, dry skin, vaginal dryness and other menopausal symptoms, such as irregular or no periods. You may also develop pain when having sex because of vaginal dryness - let your doctor or nurse know as there are treatments available to help this.

Special Instructions

Interactions with other medications Please consult your doctor, pharmacist or nurse before starting any medications. These include any prescription or over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and alternative, natural or herbal medicines. Some medications can interact with your treatment.

Use of Vaccines such as influenza 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.

Use of aspirin It is recommended that you avoid aspirin and other anti-inflammatory medications. If these medications have been prescribed by your doctor, do not stop taking them without talking to your doctor first.

Pregnancy and breast feeding Effective birth control is necessary as this treatment can cause birth defects. Do not breast feed while you are receiving this treatment. These drugs can pass into breast milk.

Cancer Council Helpline 131120

Contact Info

***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 chemotherapy may only become evident after a long period of time, but many of these can be avoided with careful monitoring. Rarely, some chemotherapy drugs can increase your chance of developing a second cancer. 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.