

## PHARMACY

Drug Information

### Pemetrexed (Alimta<sup>®</sup>) Injection



#### What is Pemetrexed?

- Pemetrexed is usually used to treat lung cancer and pleural mesothelioma.

#### How is Pemetrexed Administered / Taken?

- Pemetrexed is usually given by injection into a vein (an intravenous infusion). Patients treated with Pemetrexed will usually require Folic acid and Vitamin B12 injection to reduce treatment related side effects.
- You will need to take 400mcg of Folic acid five days before the first treatment, and then every day until three weeks after treatment with Pemetrexed is completed. While you are having Pemetrexed, it is best to avoid taking any Folic acid supplements other than those prescribed. Some multivitamins or food supplements may also contain Folic acid, so you should consult your pharmacist before taking these.
- Vitamin B12 is injected into a muscle one week before the first treatment with Pemetrexed and again with every third treatment (roughly every nine weeks).

#### Can Pemetrexed be Administered / Taken With Other Medications?

- You should **not** take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as Ibuprofen, Naproxen Sodium five days before, during and two days after Pemetrexed treatment.
- Please inform your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking other medications, including Traditional Chinese Medicines, Jamu medicines or supplements.

#### What are the Important Side Effects of Pemetrexed?

*Inform the nurses immediately during infusion of Pemetrexed if you experience the following:*

- Allergic reaction  
Pemetrexed may rarely cause an allergic reaction while it's being given. Signs of a reaction can include a rash, flushing, shortness of breath, facial or lip swelling, feeling dizzy, having abdominal, back or chest pain or feeling unwell.

- Medications prescribed by your doctor should be beneficial for your condition even though they may result in some inevitable side effects.

Side Effect	Management
Risk of infection may be increased as Pemetrexed can reduce the number of white blood cells in your blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To reduce risk of infection:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wash your hands after toileting.</li> <li>- Avoid crowds and people who are sick.</li> <li>- Avoid raw food.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Please proceed to the A&amp;E department immediately if you experience signs of infection such as fever with a temperature of 38°C and above, chills and shivering. Avoid taking Paracetamol (Panadol®) to relieve fever. Be aware that taking Paracetamol may mask fever and hence delay treatment of infection.</li> </ul>
Bruising or bleeding may occur as Pemetrexed can reduce the number of platelets in your blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To reduce risk of bleeding problems:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do not pick your nose.</li> <li>- Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush.</li> <li>- Be aware that bleeding may take a longer time to stop.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Please proceed to the A&amp;E department immediately if you experience any severe bleeding (eg, passing a large amount of fresh blood in urine or stools, or passing black sticky stools) or significant bruising.</li> </ul>
Nausea or vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take small, frequent meals.</li> <li>• Avoid smells that precipitate nausea.</li> <li>• Take medicines for nausea or vomiting prescribed by your doctor.</li> <li>• Avoid tight-fitting clothes around the waist.</li> </ul>

Side Effect	Management
Diarrhoea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform your doctor if this is severe and/or does not improve with medicine use.</li> <li>• Drink at least two litres (8 cups) of fluids every day when you are having diarrhoea.</li> <li>• Avoid milk or dairy products and/or high fibre food whilst you are having diarrhoea.</li> </ul>
Mouth ulcers can occur on the tongue, the sides of the mouth or in the throat and this can lead to an infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brush your teeth after eating and at bedtime with a soft toothbrush.</li> <li>• Rinse and brush your dentures after eating and soak them in denture solution overnight.</li> <li>• Rinsing your mouth with an alcohol-free mouth gargle or salt water may help reduce chances of infection.</li> </ul>
Numbness and tingling sensation in the hands or feet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform your doctor if you have this symptom or trouble buttoning up shirts or if you are unable to pick up objects.</li> </ul>
Skin rash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may be asked to take oral Dexamethasone starting one day before, on the day of treatment and the day after the treatment. This may help to reduce the incidence of skin rash. Inform doctor if it is severe.</li> </ul>
Changes in the way the liver works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please proceed to the A &amp; E department immediately if you experience any yellowing of eye white, skin or tea-coloured urine or severe abdominal pain.</li> </ul>

If you develop rashes, facial swelling or shortness of breath after taking the medication, you could be allergic to the medication. Please seek medical attention immediately.

### Are There any Special Precautions That I Need to Take?

- It is important to inform your doctor if you intend to conceive or breastfeed while taking this medication.
- You must **not** become pregnant during treatment with Pemetrexed and must use an effective method of contraception. You should take appropriate contraceptive measures during and up to 6 months after cessation of treatment. If pregnancy occurs during your treatment, you must inform your doctor immediately.
- Pemetrexed may have an anti-fertility effect, which could be irreversible. You should discuss with your doctor regarding fertility preservation prior to starting treatment.
- You should **not** breast-feed during treatment.

### What Else can I do to Help My Condition?

- Exercise  
Light exercise is recommended as it helps to improve mobility, balance and even emotional well-being. Do avoid strenuous exercise, and rest when you are feeling tired.
- Stay positive  
Understand your condition and take an active role in managing it. Do not be afraid to talk about it with your doctor/ pharmacist/ family members. Repressed feelings can be harmful to your immediate well-being and long-term health.
- Adequate hydration  
Maintain adequate hydration with 2 to 3 litres (8 to 12 cups) of fluids per day unless informed by your doctor to restrict fluids. This will decrease your chances of being constipated and also prevent dehydration.
- Medical and dental treatment  
If you need to go into hospital for any reason other than cancer, always inform the doctors and nurses that you are having chemotherapy.

Talk to your cancer doctor if you think you need dental treatment. Always inform your dentist that you are having chemotherapy.

If you have any problem with your treatment, please contact your doctor, pharmacist or nurse clinician.

You can also find useful information with regards to your medication on this website:

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support>

