

## PHARMACY

Drug Information

# Cytarabine Injection



### What is Cytarabine?

- Cytarabine is an anti-cancer drug used to treat certain types of leukemia or lymphoma. It may be used in combination with other chemotherapy agents.

### How is Cytarabine Injection Administered?

- Cytarabine can be administered as an injection under your skin (subcutaneous), into your vein (intravenous) or into your spine (intrathecal).

### Can Cytarabine Injection Be Administered / Taken With Other Medications?

- 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 Cytarabine Injection?

- Allergic reaction  
Cytarabine may rarely cause an allergic reaction while it's being given. Signs of a reaction can include a rash, flushing or shortness of breath, swelling of your face or lips, feeling dizzy, having abdominal, back or chest pain or feeling unwell.
- Pain along the vein  
Cytarabine may cause pain along the vein. If you feel pain, tell your nurse straight away so that the infusion site can be checked. They may give the drug more slowly or flush it through with more fluids to reduce pain.
- 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 can occur as Cytarabine can reduce the number of white	<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> </ul>

Side Effect	Management
blood cells in your blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may be prescribed medications (eg. anti-fungal and anti-viral) to reduce risk of infection.</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 can occur as Cytarabine 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
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 gently 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 regularly with an alcohol-free mouth gargle or salt water may help reduce chances of infection.</li> </ul>
Palms of hands and soles of your feet may tingle, become red, numb, painful, or swollen. Skin may also become dry or itchy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inform your doctor if blisters, severe pain or ulcers affects your normal daily activities.</li> <li>Avoid tight-fitting shoes or rubbing pressure to hands and feet if this occurs.</li> <li>Applying moisturizer to hands and feet liberally often may help.</li> <li>Applying sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 30 may help.</li> </ul>
Nails may become brittle and break easily, get darker or discoloured; rarely, nails may come off	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wearing gloves when washing dishes or using detergents will help protect your nails during treatment.</li> <li>If you get pain, redness or swelling around your nails, inform your doctors.</li> </ul>
Flu-like symptoms (fever, muscle ache, bone pain, lethargy), rash, sore eyes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These symptoms may occur 6-12 hours after intravenous Cytarabine, and resolve 24 hours after Cytarabine is discontinued. Please inform your doctor as soon as these symptoms occur.</li> </ul>
Dizziness, headache, loss of balance, excessive sleepiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These symptoms usually occur with high dose Cytarabine and may last up to 1 week.</li> <li>Please proceed to the A &amp; E department immediately if you experience seizures, hallucinations or confusion.</li> </ul>

Side Effect	Management
Swelling, bruising, tenderness and redness of the skin at injection site (for subcutaneous injection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply cool compress on the area or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.</li> <li>Inform your doctor if the symptoms do not subside.</li> </ul>
Cough, difficulty breathing, breathlessness, swelling of ankles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please proceed to the A &amp; E department immediately if you experience such symptoms.</li> </ul>
Eye irritation or changes in eyesight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your doctor may prescribe steroid eye drops to reduce the incidence of these side effects. Use them as directed.</li> <li>Inform your doctor if you develop worsening redness and pain in the eye, increased eye watering; blurred vision and/or sensitivity to light.</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 Cytarabine 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.
- Cytarabine 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>



© Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore 2021. All rights reserved. All information correct as of January 2021. No part of this document may be reproduced, copied, reverse compiled, adapted, distributed, commercially exploited, displayed or stored in a database, retrieval system or transmitted in any form without prior permission of Tan Tock Seng Hospital. All information and material found in this document are for purposes of information only and are not meant to substitute any advice provided by your own physician or other medical professionals.