

PHARMACY

Drug Information

FOLFOX Regimen [Fluorouracil, Leucovorin, Oxaliplatin]



What is FOLFOX Regimen?

- FOLFOX regimen is usually given for the treatment of biliary, colorectal, stomach, oesophageal, and pancreatic cancer. It consists of three different drugs: Oxaliplatin, Leucovorin (Folinic acid) and Fluorouracil.
- Leucovorin is not a chemotherapy drug. It is often given with Fluorouracil, as it has been shown to make it work better.

How is FOLFOX Regimen Administered?

- FOLFOX is given as separate injections into your vein (intravenous) and the cycle is repeated every 14 days.
- On the first day of treatment, you are given Oxaliplatin and Folinic acid as a drip (infusion). After this, you will have Fluorouracil given as an intravenous injection followed by an infusion over 46 hours via a small portable pump. You can go home once the infusion starts and return two days later for the nurse to disconnect your pump when your infusion has completed.

Can FOLFOX Regimen be Administered 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 FOLFOX Regimen?

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

- Allergic reaction
FOLFOX 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.
- Laryngeal spasm
Oxaliplatin may rarely affect the area around the voice box (larynx), resulting in difficulties with swallowing and breathing. This might happen during the treatment or in the first few days after treatment. This symptom may be worse in cold environment so it is advisable to keep yourself warm by wearing a jacket or take hot beverages for at least few days after treatment.

- Pain along the vein
FOLFOX may cause pain at the site where the injection is given or 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 fluid 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 Effects	Management
Risk of infection can occur as FOLFOX can reduce the number of white blood cells in your blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reduce risk of infection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wash your hands after toileting. - Avoid crowds and people who are sick. - Avoid raw food. • Please proceed to the A&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.
Bruising or bleeding can occur as FOLFOX can reduce the number of platelets in your blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reduce risk of bleeding problems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not pick your nose. - Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush. - Be aware that bleeding may take a longer time to stop. • Please proceed to the A&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.

Side Effects	Management
Nausea or vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take small, frequent meals. • Avoid smells that precipitate nausea. • Take medicines for nausea or vomiting prescribed by your doctor. • Avoid tight-fitting clothes around the waist
Diarrhoea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform your doctor if this is severe and/or does not improve with medicine use. • Drink at least two litres (8 cups) of fluids every day when you are having diarrhoea. • Avoid milk or dairy products and/or high fibre food whilst you are having diarrhoea.
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"> • Brush your teeth gently after eating and at bedtime with a soft toothbrush. • Rinse and brush your dentures after eating and soak them in denture solution overnight. • Rinsing your mouth regularly with an alcohol-free mouth gargle or salt water may help reduce chances of infection.
Hand-foot syndrome may occur during treatment. The palms of hands and soles of your feet may tingle, become red, darken, numb, painful, swollen or creases may be observed. Skin may also become dry or itchy. Nail beds may also darken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform your doctor if blisters, severe pain or ulcers affects your normal daily activities. • Avoid tight-fitting shoes or rubbing pressure to hands and feet if this occurs. • Applying moisturizer to hands and feet liberally often may help. • Applying sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 30 may help.

Side Effects	Management
Numbness and tingling sensation in the hands or feet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform your doctor if you have this symptom or trouble buttoning up shirts or if you are unable to pick up objects
Fatigue or Tiredness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not drive or operate machinery if you are feeling tired. Inform your doctor if fatigue is persistent or worsens.
Heart problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please proceed to the A & E department immediately if you experience signs of heart problems such as shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chest pain, fast heart beat or sudden swelling of legs.

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 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.
- FOLFOX regimen 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 two to three 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>

