

## PHARMACY

Drug Information

### Irinotecan Injection



#### What is Irinotecan?

- Irinotecan is used either alone or in combination with other drugs to treat cancers of the gastrointestinal tract including colorectal cancer, stomach, oesophageal and pancreatic cancer.

#### How is Irinotecan Administered / Taken?

- Irinotecan is usually given by injection into a vein (an intravenous infusion) over 30 to 90 minutes.

#### Can Irinotecan 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 Irinotecan?

- Allergic reaction  
Irinotecan 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  
Irinotecan 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 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 Irinotecan 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 can occur as Irinotecan 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>
Early diarrhoea (may occur 24 hours after Irinotecan treatment), accompanied with watery eyes, stomach cramps and sweating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform nurses/ doctor immediately if it happens while chemotherapy is being given or proceed to A &amp; E department if it happens when you get home.</li> </ul>

Side Effect	Management
Late diarrhoea (may occur one day to several days after Irinotecan treatment). It starts with stools more loose or often than usual.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Late diarrhea must be treated immediately with Loperamide tablets.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Take two tablets at the first sign of loose or more frequent stools than usual.</li> <li>-Then take one tablet every two hours until diarrhea has stopped for 12 hours.</li> <li>-At night, you may take two tablets every four hours during the time you usually sleep.</li> <li>-This dose is much higher than the package directions. It is very important that you take this higher dose to stop the diarrhea.</li> <li>-Always keep a supply of Loperamide (eg, have 48 tablets on hand). You can buy loperamide at any pharmacy without a prescription.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Proceed to A &amp; E department if diarrhea does not improve 24 hours after starting loperamide or lasts more than 36 hours.</li> <li>• Drink at least two litres (8 cups) of fluids every day when you have diarrhoea.</li> <li>• Avoid milk or dairy products and/or high fibre food whilst you are having diarrhoea.</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
Hair Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wear a wig or hat or use a gentle shampoo.</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 Irinotecan and must use an effective method of contraception. You should take appropriate contraceptive measures during and up to six months after cessation of treatment. If pregnancy occurs during your treatment, you must inform your doctor immediately.
- Irinotecan 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>



© Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore 2020. All rights reserved. All information correct as of October 2020. 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.