

## Medication Information Sheet

# gemcitabine

 (Jem-SITE-a-been)

*This document provides general information about your medication. It does not replace the advice of your health care professional. Always discuss your therapy with your health care professional and refer to the package insert for more details.*

**Other name:** Generic brand(s) available, Gemzar®

**Appearance:** Clear, colourless solution mixed into larger bags of fluids

## What it is used for

- For treating bladder, pancreas, lung, breast or other cancers.

## Before using it

- Tell your doctor if you have/had significant medical condition(s), especially if you have / had radiation, liver disease, or any allergies.
- Gemcitabine may harm the unborn baby.
- Let your doctor know if you are breastfeeding, pregnant or plan to become pregnant
- People who have cancer or leukemia are at a higher risk of developing other cancers/leukemias (usually some years later). Some cancer medications may increase these risks, especially if used for a prolonged period of time. You should discuss any concerns about this drug with your doctor.

## Pregnancy and breastfeeding

- Do not use this drug if you are pregnant. If there is ANY chance that you or your partner may become pregnant, you and your partner together must: ► **Use 2 effective forms of birth control at the same time** while taking this drug. Do not take birth control pills if you have breast cancer. Keep using birth control until **6 months** after the last dose (general recommendation). Discuss with your healthcare team.
- Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant.
- Do not breastfeed while taking this drug.
- Effects on Fertility: Probable

## How it is given

- This drug is given by injection into a vein.

## While taking it

- This drug can interact with other drugs, and can result in the drugs not working as well or cause severe side effects.
- Make sure your doctor and pharmacist know about all your medicines (prescription or over-the-counter ones, herbals and supplements). Check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting or stopping any of them.

## Side effects and what to do

The following side effects are common or severe. You may not have all of the side effects. Other side effects may occur. If you have any unusual or bothersome symptoms, discuss with your doctor.

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
<b>Most Common Side Effects</b>	
<p><b>Anemia</b> (unusual tiredness or weakness, pale skin)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May occur in days to weeks after your dose is given/ after treatment starts</li> <li>• May be due to low red blood cells</li> <li>• Rest often. Have a well-balanced diet.</li> <li>• Light exercise may help, with short activity times and in-between breaks.</li> <li>• Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you feel tired or weak.</li> <li>• Some patients may need medication or blood transfusion to correct low red blood cells.</li> <li>• Also see Anemia pamphlet.*</li> </ul>	Contact doctor if no improvement or if severe
<p><b>Nausea and vomiting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink clear fluids and avoid large meals. Get fresh air and rest.</li> <li>• Limit spicy, fried foods or foods with a strong smell.</li> <li>• Take anti-nausea drug(s) exactly as directed by your doctor. It is easier to prevent nausea than to treat it.</li> <li>• Contact your doctor if nausea lasts more than 1 day or if any vomiting occurs.</li> <li>• Also see Nausea &amp; Vomiting pamphlet.*</li> </ul>	Contact doctor if no improvement or if severe
<p><b>Proteins in Urine; Kidney problems</b> (lower back pain, body swelling)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Also look for passing little or no urine, darkening or blood in urine, or recent unusual weight gain</li> </ul>	Get emergency medical help right away

\*The most updated version and more symptom control information can be found on: <http://www.cancercare.on.ca/druginfo>  
Prepared with input from the Cancer Care Ontario-Medication Information Sheets Working Group.  
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your doctor may monitor for proteins in the urine regularly.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Rash; dry, itchy skin</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay out of the sun; wear sunblock, a hat and cover exposed skin.</li> <li>Use daily moisturizer.</li> <li>In rare cases, rash may be severe (may include blisters or skin peeling); if severe, get emergency medical help right away.</li> </ul>	Contact doctor if no improvement or if severe
<p><b>Mild swelling in arms and legs; puffiness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep your feet up when sitting. Eat a low-salt diet.</li> <li>Avoid tight fitting clothing.</li> </ul>	Contact doctor if no improvement or if severe
<p><b>Flu-like feeling</b> (fever, chills without signs of infection such as sore throat, cough, or blistering rash on skin)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May happen in hours to days after drug is given / after starting treatment.</li> <li>These side effects may go away as your body gets used to the drug.</li> <li>Contact your doctor or nurse if these feelings bother you.</li> <li>May take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) tablets as needed.</li> </ul>	Contact doctor if no improvement or if severe
<p><b>Hair thinning or loss</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use a gentle soft brush; care should be taken with hair sprays, bleaches, dyes and perms.</li> <li>Your hair usually grows back after your treatment ends, but the texture or colour may change.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Diarrhea</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drink plenty of clear fluids. Limit hot, spicy, fried foods, foods/drinks with caffeine, orange or prune juice.</li> <li>Try a low-fiber BRAT diet (Bananas, white Rice, Apple sauce, Toast made with white bread).</li> <li>Take anti-diarrhea drug(s) if given to you by your doctor.</li> <li>Also see Diarrhea pamphlet.*</li> </ul>	Contact doctor if no improvement or if severe
<p><b>Tiredness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rest often; take naps if needed. Move slowly when getting up.</li> <li>Eat well-balanced meals and drink plenty of fluids. Light exercise may help.</li> <li>Do not drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery when feeling tired.</li> </ul>	Contact doctor if no improvement or if severe
<p><b>Headache; mild joint, muscle pain or cramps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) tablets as needed for mild aches and pains. Talk to your doctor first before using ibuprofen (Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®), since these may increase bleeding risk. If you feel unwell, take your temperature before using any of these drugs, since they may mask fever.</li> <li>Rest often, but may try light exercise.</li> </ul>	Contact doctor if no improvement or if severe
<b>Less Common Side Effects, but may be Severe</b>	
<p><b>Fever, chills, infection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May occur in days to weeks after the dose is given / after treatment starts</li> <li>Low white blood cells may make the body more prone to infection.</li> </ul>	Get emergency medical help right away

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone your doctor right away or go to the nearest emergency department, if your oral temperature is over 38°C or 100.4°F (unless stated otherwise by your healthcare team). Tell the healthcare team that you are on chemotherapy.</li> <li>• Check your temperature, especially if you are feeling unwell with sweats, fever or chills. Take your temperature before using acetaminophen (Tylenol®), since it may mask fever.</li> <li>• Wash your hands often. Avoid sick people and crowds.</li> <li>• Check with your doctor before getting any vaccines.</li> <li>• Also see Low White Blood Cells pamphlet.*</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Unusual bleeding or bruising</b> (black stools, coughing up blood, purple or red dots on skin, bleeding that will not stop)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May occur in days to weeks after your dose is given/ after treatment starts</li> <li>• Use a soft toothbrush. Be careful not to cut or bruise yourself.</li> <li>• Check with your doctor before any surgery or dental work.</li> <li>• Use acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for fever, mild headache, aches or pains.</li> <li>• Talk to your doctor first before using other drugs such as ibuprofen (Advil®) or naproxen Aleve®) or aspirin, since they may increase bleeding risk. If taking aspirin regularly, talk to your doctor before you stop taking it.</li> <li>• Also see Low Platelets pamphlet.*</li> </ul>	Get emergency medical help right away
<p><b>Liver problems</b> (yellow skin or eyes, dark urine)</p>	Get emergency medical help right away
<p><b>Acute kidney failure, bleeding, breakdown of red blood cells</b></p>	Get emergency medical help right away
<p><b>Lung problems</b> (increased cough, breathing problems, chest pain, coughing blood)</p>	Get emergency medical help right away
<p><b>Inflammation of blood vessels in the brain, kidney or skin</b></p>	Contact doctor as soon as possible (office hours)
<p><b>Heart problems</b> (irregular heartbeat, chest pain, fainting, swelling, shortness of breath)</p>	Get emergency medical help right away
<p><b>Heart attack</b> (chest pain, shortness of breath)</p>	Get emergency medical help right away
<p><b>Allergic reaction</b> (fever, severe rash, itchiness, swollen face, lip or tongue, chest or throat tightness)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May occur during or shortly after the drug is given.</li> </ul>	Get emergency medical help right away

*The information set out in the medication information sheets, regimen information sheets, and symptom management information (for patients) contained in the Drug Formulary (the "Formulary") is intended to be used by health professionals and patients for informational purposes only. The information is not intended to cover all possible uses, directions, precautions, drug interactions or side effects of a certain drug, nor should it be used to indicate that use of a particular*

*drug is safe, appropriate or effective for a given condition.*

*A patient should always consult a healthcare provider if he/she has any questions regarding the information set out in the Formulary. The information in the Formulary is not intended to act as or replace medical advice and should not be relied upon in any such regard. All uses of the Formulary are subject to clinical judgment and actual prescribing patterns may not follow the information provided in the Formulary.*