

# FEC: Fluorouracil, Epirubicin and Cyclophosphamide

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## What is FEC?

This is the short name for the drugs used for this chemotherapy treatment. The three drugs you will receive during this treatment are Fluorouracil (Acrucil or “**F**”), Epirubicin (Ellence “**E**”), and Cyclophosphamide (Cytosan or “**C**”).

## What is Fluorouracil (flure-oh-YOOR-a-sil) and how does it work?

Fluorouracil is a chemotherapy drug known as an “antimetabolite.” This drug is made in a laboratory and looks like a building block of your DNA. This drug fights cancer by stopping the fast growing cancer cells from making new cells.

## What is Epirubicin (ep-i-ROO-bi-sin) and how does it work?

Epirubicin is a chemotherapy drug known as an “anti-tumor antibiotic.” It is a bright red color. It is a natural medicine that comes from a type of soil fungus. This drug fights cancer by stopping the fast growing cancer cells from making new cells. It also keeps the damaged cancer cells from continuing to grow.

## What is Cyclophosphamide (sy-e-kloe-FOS-fa-mide) and how does it work?

Cyclophosphamide is a chemotherapy drug known as an “alkylating agent.” This drug is made in a laboratory. Cyclophosphamide works to stop fast growing cancer cells from dividing and making new cells.

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**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

## **Why am I getting three chemotherapy drugs for my cancer?**

These drugs work to stop fast growing cancer cells from dividing and making new cells, but they attack the cancer cells differently. Giving the three drugs together makes the treatment more effective.

## **What should I tell my doctor before getting chemotherapy?**

Talk to your doctor about the following:

- If you have ever had chemotherapy and the names of the chemotherapy drugs you were given.
- If you have ever had heart, liver, or kidney problems.
- If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant. Your doctor will talk with you about birth control while getting chemotherapy.
- If you are breastfeeding.
- If you have been told that you need to start a new medicine.
- The medicines/pills you are taking, including:
  - ▶ Medicines prescribed by any of your doctors
  - ▶ Herbs
  - ▶ Vitamins
  - ▶ Over-the-counter medicines

## **How does my doctor decide my chemotherapy dose?**

To determine your treatment dose, your doctor will review the following: your height, your weight, your medicines, how well your liver and kidneys are working, and any other health problems you have. Three to six doses of this chemotherapy are usually given. You will receive a dose every three weeks. You will see the doctor or nurse practitioner prior to each dose of your “FEC” chemotherapy.

## **Should I eat or drink before my treatment?**

It is best to eat a small meal before getting your chemotherapy. Drinking plenty of non-caffeinated fluids may also be helpful. However, if you have been told to limit fluids, check with your doctor about how much you can drink.

## How will my treatment be given?

You will be given medicine 30 to 60 minutes before your treatment to prevent nausea or vomiting.

**Fluorouracil** is given directly into your blood stream through a tube (IV) placed in your arm or chest. Your nurse will stay with you while the Fluorouracil is given. This treatment takes about 1 to 3 minutes. **Tell your nurse right away if you feel any pain, stinging or burning while getting this chemotherapy drug.**

**Epirubicin** is given directly into your blood stream through a tube (IV) placed in your arm or chest. Your nurse will stay with you while the Epirubicin is given. This treatment will take about 15 to 20 minutes. **Tell your nurse right away if you feel any pain, stinging or burning while getting this chemotherapy drug.**

**Cyclophosphamide** is given directly into your blood stream through a tube (IV) placed in your arm or chest. Cyclophosphamide comes in a bag with tubing attached. The nurse will connect the tubing to a pump. This treatment takes between 30 and 60 minutes.

Your entire visit, including your doctor's appointment and your treatment will take about 6 hours.

## What are the side effects of this treatment?

Every person responds differently to treatment. Some of the more common side effects of this chemotherapy are:

- Pain where the Epirubicin went into your vein
- Red urine for 1 or 2 days after getting Epirubicin
- Nausea and/or vomiting lasting for several days
- Fatigue
- Hair loss, including the hair on the head and body (this normally begins 10 to 14 days after starting chemotherapy)
- Mouth pain or open sores in the mouth
- Low white blood cell count (may increase your risk for infection)
- Low hemoglobin (may cause you to have less energy and tire more easily)
- Low platelet count (may cause you to bleed more easily or longer than normal and have more bruising)

## When should I call my doctor?

You should call your doctor right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or higher

**A fever can be life-threatening if not treated. Your doctor may ask you to go to the hospital.**

- Chills, sore throat, cough or a wound that does not get better
- Open sores in your mouth
- Nausea that prevents you from eating or drinking
- Vomiting even after you have taken your anti-nausea medicine
- Skin redness or blisters where the Epirubicin was given
- Bleeding or bruising, including bloody or black stools or blood in your urine
- Diarrhea (4 or more loose stools in 24 hours)
- Changes in your heartbeat
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Swelling in feet or ankles
- Fast weight gain

## Is there anything else I should know about this treatment?

- **Epirubicin** may cause problems with the pumping of your heart. Your doctor will order a test to check your heart before you start taking this chemotherapy drug.
- Chemotherapy may make it harder for your body to fight infections. Wash your hands often and avoid people who are sick.
- This treatment requires special precautions to prevent the chemotherapy drugs from coming into contact (through blood, urine, bowel movements, vomit and vaginal or seminal fluids) with others. Your chemotherapy nurse will give you guidelines to follow for 48 hours after receiving chemotherapy.
- Chemotherapy can change how your body reacts to vaccines. Talk to your doctor before getting any vaccines.
- Patients who get treatment with these drugs have a slightly higher risk of getting a rare form of blood cancer, called “leukemia”. Your doctor can tell you more about this risk.

- You should drink 8 to 10 eight-ounce glasses of non-caffeinated fluid each day throughout your treatment. This is important to keep you hydrated while you are receiving chemotherapy.
- This treatment may cause women to stop having menstrual cycles. Depending on your age, your menstrual cycles may or may not return.
- It may be difficult to get pregnant even after the chemotherapy is finished.
- This treatment may affect your ability to have children. Talk to your doctor before getting chemotherapy if you are planning to have children in the future.

For more information about cancer, chemotherapy, side effects or how to care for yourself during treatment, refer to your **Chemotherapy and You** book, or ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

You may also find it helpful to watch The James Patient Education videos at <http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos> to help you learn tips for managing treatment side effects.