Gemcitabine and Cisplatin

What is Gemcitabine (jem-SITE-a been)?

Gemcitabine is a chemotherapy medicine known as an “anti-metabolite”. Another name for this drug is Gemzar. This drug is made in a laboratory. It tricks the cancer cell into thinking it is a building block for making new cells. Once inside the cancer cell, it causes damage so that the cell cannot grow or make more cancer cells.

What is Cisplatin (SIS-pla-tin)?

Cisplatin is a chemotherapy medicine known as an “alkylating agent”. This drug is made in a laboratory. It stops fast growing cancer cells from dividing and making new cells by destroying the DNA of the cell.

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 liver or kidney problems.
• If you have hearing or inner ear problems, balance or dizziness 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

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

How does my doctor decide my chemotherapy dose?

To determine your treatment dose, your doctor will review the following: your stage of cancer, your height, your weight, your medicines, how well your liver and kidneys are working, and any other health problems you have. This chemotherapy is normally given one day per week for 2 weeks in a row, followed by a week off. You will see the doctor or nurse practitioner about once every 3 weeks when you are getting this treatment.

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 and vomiting. You may also receive IV fluids before or after receiving your Cisplatin. This extra fluid will help protect your kidneys from damage that can be caused by this drug.

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

Cisplatin is given directly into your bloodstream through a tube (IV) placed in your arm or chest. Cisplatin comes in a large bag with tubing attached. The nurse will connect the tubing to a pump. This treatment takes 1 to 3 hours depending on the dose of Cisplatin.

Your entire visit, including your doctor’s appointment and your treatment will take between 3 to 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:

- Fever, chills and aches on the day you receive your Gemcitabine, this is not caused by infection.
- Nausea and/or vomiting lasting for several days after chemotherapy
- Numbness, tingling and pain in hands and feet
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Thinning of your hair
- Mouth pain or open sores in the mouth
- Damage to your kidneys
- Increase in enzymes made by your liver (your doctor will check your blood to monitor how your liver is working)
- Diarrhea
- Rash or itching
- Swelling in hands, ankles or feet
- Difficulty breathing or wheezing
- Ringing in the ears, dizziness, balance problems
- 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 counts (may cause you to bleed more easily or longer than normal and have more bruising)
- Decrease in the amount of electrolytes in your bloodstream (your doctor will check your blood at times during your treatment to monitor the amount of electrolytes in your blood)

**When should I call my doctor?**

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

- Signs of an allergic reaction, including:
  - Difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest pain or tightness
  - Swelling of your face, lips, tongue, or throat
  - Rash
- 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
• Bleeding or bruising, including bloody or black stools or blood in your urine
• Diarrhea (4 or more loose stools in 24 hours)
• Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
• Swelling in hands, feet or ankles
• Fast weight gain
• Changes in urine, dark urine, or no urine output for more than 12 hours
• Yellowing of skin or eyes
• Changes in hearing or balance
• Severe muscle cramps or twitching

Is there anything else I should know about this treatment?
• Some patients may have an allergic reaction while Cisplatin is being given or within a day or two after receiving treatment.
  ▶ If an allergic reaction happens during your treatment, the nurse will give you medicine to help manage the reaction and extra precautions will be taken when your next treatment is given.
  ▶ You may also have a delayed allergic reaction a day or two after treatment. You will be given instructions on what to do if this happens.
• 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.
- 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 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.