

# **Paclitaxel and Carboplatin**

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## **What is Paclitaxel (pak-li-TAX-el) and how does it work?**

Paclitaxel is a chemotherapy drug known as an “anti-microtubule inhibitor”. Another name for this drug is Taxol. It is a natural medicine that comes from the bark of Pacific Yew trees. This drug fights cancer by stopping fast growing cancer cells from dividing and making new cancer cells.

## **What is Carboplatin (KAR-bo-pla-tin) and how does it work?**

Carboplatin is a chemotherapy medicine known as an “alkylating agent”. Another name for this drug is Paraplatin. 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.

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

Both drugs work to stop fast growing cancer cells from dividing and making new cells, but they attack the cancer cells differently. Giving the two 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, kidney or liver problems.
- If you are allergic to Cremophor EL.

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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.**

- 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 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 may be given in a variety of different schedules. It is often given once weekly or once every 3 weeks. You will see the doctor or nurse practitioner about once every 3 to 4 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 treatment. 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 several medicines, 30 to 60 minutes before your treatment, to prevent you from having an allergic reaction. **These medicines may affect your abilities, so for your safety you should have someone drive you home.**

**Paclitaxel** is given directly into your blood stream through a tube (IV) placed in your arm or chest. Paclitaxel comes in a bag with tubing attached. The nurse will connect the tubing to a pump. This treatment takes between 1 and 3 hours depending on the dose.

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

Your entire visit, including your doctor's appointment and your treatment will take between 4 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:

- Numbness, tingling or pain in hands or feet
- Fatigue
- Hair loss, including the hair on the head and body (this normally begins 10 to 14 days after 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)
- Muscle or joint aches and pain
- Allergic reaction to the chemotherapy drug
- Changes in your nails
- Rash
- Nausea and/or vomiting lasting for several days
- Weakness
- 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)
- Hearing changes or ringing in your ears

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

<b>A fever can be life threatening if not treated. Your doctor may ask you to go to the hospital.</b>
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- Numbness, tingling or pain that keeps you from doing simple tasks, such as walking, buttoning your shirt or holding a cup
- 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 at the place where your chemotherapy was given
- 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
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Swelling in feet or ankles
- No urine output for more than 12 hours
- Changes in your ability to hear or ringing in your ears
- Severe muscle cramps or twitching
- Severe tiredness, weakness or pain

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

- Some patients may have an allergic reaction while the Paclitaxel is being given. To prevent this, you will be given a medicine **before** your treatment. If an allergic reaction does happen 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.
- Some patients may have an allergic reaction while Carboplatin 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 cause women to stop having menstrual cycles. Depending on your age, your menstrual cycles may or may not return.
- 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.