

## Paclitaxel (Taxol)

---

### About This Drug

Paclitaxel is a drug used to treat cancer. It is given in the vein (IV).

### Possible Side Effects

- Bone marrow suppression. This is a decrease in the number of white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets. This may raise your risk of infection, make you tired and weak (fatigue), and raise your risk of bleeding.
- Abnormal EKG (electrocardiogram)
- Soreness of the mouth and throat. You may have red areas, white patches, or sores in your mouth that hurt.
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up)
- Diarrhea (loose bowel movements)
- Abnormal bleeding – symptoms may be coughing up blood, throwing up blood (may look like coffee grounds), red or black tarry bowel movements, abnormally heavy menstrual flow, nosebleeds or any other unusual bleeding.
- Swelling of your legs, ankles and/or feet
- Injection site reaction -you may get a rash, swelling or bruising or your skin may get red, warm, itchy or painful at the site of your infusion
- Allergic reaction: Allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis are rare but may happen in some patients. Signs of allergic reaction to this drug may be swelling of the face, feeling like your tongue or throat are swelling, trouble breathing, rash, itching, fever, chills, feeling dizzy, and/or feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way. If this happens, do not take another dose of this drug. You should get urgent medical treatment.
- Changes in your liver function
- Infection
- Bone, joint and muscle pain
- Effects on the nerves are called peripheral neuropathy. You may feel numbness, tingling, or pain in your hands and feet. It may be hard for you to button your clothes, open jars, or walk as usual. The effect on the nerves may get worse with more doses of the drug. These effects get better in some people after the drug is stopped but it does not get better in all people.
- Changes in your kidney function
- Hair loss. Hair loss is often temporary, although with certain medicine, hair loss can sometimes be permanent. Hair loss may happen suddenly or gradually. If you lose hair, you may lose it from your head, face, armpits, pubic area, chest, and/or legs. You may also notice your hair getting thin.
- Flushing

- Low blood pressure

**Note:** *Not all possible side effects are included above.*

## Warnings and Precautions

- Severe allergic reactions which can be life-threatening.
- Severe bone marrow suppression
- Severe abnormal heartbeat which can rarely require pacemaker placement.

## Important Information

- This drug may be present in the saliva, tears, sweat, urine, stool, vomit, semen, and vaginal secretions. Talk to your doctor and/or your nurse about the necessary precautions to take during this time.

## Treating Side Effects

- Manage tiredness by pacing your activities for the day.
- Be sure to include periods of rest between energy-draining activities.
- To decrease the risk of infection, wash your hands regularly.
- Avoid close contact with people who have a cold, the flu, or other infections.
- Take your temperature as your doctor or nurse tells you, and whenever you feel like you may have a fever.
- To help decrease the risk of bleeding, use a soft toothbrush. Check with your nurse before using dental floss.
- Be very careful when using knives or tools.
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor.
- Drink plenty of fluids (a minimum of eight glasses per day is recommended).
- If you throw up or have loose bowel movements, you should drink more fluids so that you do not become dehydrated (lack of water in the body from losing too much fluid).
- To help with nausea and vomiting, eat small, frequent meals instead of three large meals a day. Choose foods and drinks that are at room temperature. Ask your nurse or doctor about other helpful tips and medicine that is available to help stop or lessen these symptoms.
- If you have diarrhea, eat low-fiber foods that are high in protein and calories and avoid foods that can irritate your digestive tracts or lead to cramping.
- Ask your doctor or nurse about medicines that are available to help stop or lessen diarrhea and/or nausea.
- Keeping your pain under control is important to your well-being. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you are experiencing pain.
- Get regular exercise. If you feel too tired to exercise vigorously, try taking a short walk.
- Mouth care is very important. Your mouth care should consist of routine, gentle cleaning of your teeth or dentures and rinsing your mouth with a mixture of 1/2 teaspoon of salt in 8 ounces of water



or 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda in 8 ounces of water. This should be done at least after each meal and at bedtime.

- If you have mouth sores, avoid mouthwash that has alcohol. Also avoid alcohol and smoking because they can bother your mouth and throat.
- If you have numbness and tingling in your hands and feet, be careful when cooking, walking, and handling sharp objects and hot liquids.
- To help with hair loss, wash with a mild shampoo and avoid washing your hair every day.
- Avoid rubbing your scalp, instead, pat your hair or scalp dry.
- Avoid coloring your hair.
- Limit your use of hair spray, electric curlers, blow dryers, and curling irons.
- If you are interested in getting a wig, talk to your nurse. You can also call the American Cancer Society at 800-ACS-2345 to find out information about the “Look Good, Feel Better” program close to where you live. It is a free program where women getting chemotherapy can learn about wigs, turbans and scarves as well as makeup techniques and skin and nail care.

## Food and Drug Interactions

- There are no known interactions of paclitaxel with food.
- This drug may interact with other medicines. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the prescription and over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements (vitamins, minerals, herbs and others) that you are taking at this time. Also, check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new prescription or over-the-counter medicines, or dietary supplements to make sure that there are no interactions.

## When to Call the Doctor

Call your doctor or nurse if you have any of the following symptoms and/or any new or unusual symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher
- Chills
- Signs of a local infection such as pain, redness, tenderness, warmth and/or swelling
- Extreme tiredness or weakness that interferes with normal activities
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way (palpitations)
- Easy bruising or bleeding
- Blood in your urine, vomit (bright red or coffee-ground) and/or stools (bright red, or black/tarry)
- Coughing up blood
- Pain in your mouth or throat that makes it hard to eat or drink
- Lasting loss of appetite or rapid weight loss of five pounds in a week
- Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking, and/or that is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Throwing up more than 3 times a day
- Diarrhea, 4 times in one day or diarrhea with weakness or lightheadedness



- Numbness, tingling, or pain in your hands and feet
- Weight gain of 5 pounds in one week (fluid retention)
- Swelling of your legs, ankles and/or feet
- Decreased urine or very dark urine
- Signs of liver problems: dark urine, pale bowel movements, bad stomach pain, feeling very tired and weak, unusual itching, or yellowing of the eyes or skin
- Pain that does not go away or is not relieved by prescribed medicine
- While you are getting this drug, please tell your nurse right away if you have any pain, redness, or swelling at the site of the IV infusion.
- Signs of allergic reaction: swelling of the face, feeling like your tongue or throat are swelling, trouble breathing, rash, itching, fever, chills, feeling dizzy, and/or feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way. **If this happens, call 911 for emergency care.**
- If you think you are pregnant

## Reproduction Warnings

- **Pregnancy warning:** This drug can have harmful effects on the unborn baby. Women of child-bearing potential should use effective methods of birth control during your cancer treatment. Let your doctor know right away if you think you may be pregnant.
- **Breastfeeding warning:** It is not known if this drug passes into breast milk. For this reason, women should not breastfeed during treatment because this drug could enter the breast milk and cause harm to a breastfeeding baby.
- **Fertility warning:** In men and women both, this drug may affect your ability to have children in the future. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you plan to have children. Ask for information on sperm or egg banking.

Reviewed June 2020

