

Gemcitabine

Names	The generic drug name is gemcitabine (jem-SITE-a- been). The brand name is Gemzar®. There may be other names for this medication.
How is it Given?	Your medication will be given by injection into a vein (intravenous or IV), usually in your arm, wrist, hand or chest.
Why am I Taking I Gemcitabine?	Gemcitabine is used in combination with other anti-cancer medications to treat cancers of the pancreas, ovary, breast, and (non-small cell) lung that has not improved after other treatments, or that has recurred after treatment, or that has spread to other parts of the body (metastasized). It may also be used to treat bladder cancer.
How Does it Work?	<p>Cancers are diseases in which abnormal cells reproduce uncontrollably. Many chemo medications used this fast-paced reproduction to identify and attack cancer cells. Unfortunately, normal cells that reproduce quickly can also be affected. These normal cells will eventually grow back and be healthy.</p> <p>Your chemo schedule is based upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• your cancer type and how fast the cancer cells reproduce• the phase of the cell cycle when the chemo is most effective – the resting, growing, or reproduction phases <p>With these factors in mind, your doctors create a chemo schedule to give each medication when it will do the most damage to the cancer.</p> <p>Gemcitabine is in a class of drugs known as antimetabolites; more specifically, it is a pyrimidine antagonist. Gemcitabine is biologically similar to substances normally found inside the cell. Once it gets into the cell, it interrupts the cell cycle and stops it from reproducing. If they can't reproduce, they die.</p>

What Should I Tell
My Doctor Before I
Begin?

Tell your doctor if you:

- have ever had an allergic reaction to gemcitabine or other medications
- if you currently drink large amounts of alcohol (or have ever done so), have or have ever had liver disease (such as hepatitis) or kidney disease
- if you have ever received radiation therapy
- are pregnant or breastfeeding

This drug may interact with other medications, increasing or decreasing their effectiveness or causing harmful side effects. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal or diet supplements that you take.

What Are Some
Possible Side
Effects?

More common

- Flu-like symptoms - muscle aches, fever, chills, etc.
- Fever (usually within 10 hours of the 1st dose)
- Fatigue
- Poor appetite, mild nausea, vomiting
- Low blood counts – decreased levels of white blood cells, red blood cells, and/or platelets, which may increase your risk of infection, fatigue, and/or bleeding
- Rash
- Blood or protein in your urine

Less common

- Diarrhea and/or constipation
- Thin or brittle hair, hair loss
- Mouth sores/blisters
- Sleep problems
- Weakness

How Can I Manage
These Side Effects?

- Flu symptoms: Keep warm and drink plenty of liquids (2-3 quarts every 24 hours, unless your doctor gives you other instructions). Ask your doctor before taking any over the counter medications.
- To help avoid infections: Stay away from people with colds or other infections. Wash your hands often. Talk to your doctor before you have any vaccinations, such as a flu shot.

How Can I Manage
These Side Effects?
(cont)

- **Fatigue:** Take rests during the day, limit your activities, and plan activity at a time of day when you feel a bit more energetic. Learn to ask for and accept help with household and daily chores.
- **To help decrease risk of bleeding:** Be careful when handling sharp objects. Avoid rough sports or other situations that could cause injury. Use an electric razor. Be careful when using a toothbrush or dental floss (your doctor may recommend other ways to clean your teeth).
- **To help prevent nausea:** Avoid spicy and greasy foods. Try eating smaller meals more often during the day instead of 2-3 large meals.
- **To help prevent diarrhea,** drink small sips of a liquid such as a sugar-free sports drink often throughout the day, eat mild foods such as crackers, and avoid spicy foods.
- **Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea:** Ask your doctor about medications to help prevent or lessen these side effects.
- **Mouth care is very important.** Rinse your mouth with a mixture of ½ teaspoon of baking soda in 8 ounces of water after every meal and at bedtime. Brush your teeth and gums often with soft toothbrush. (Soften it further by running it under warm water before brushing) Avoid smoking, alcohol, and mouthwashes that contain alcohol.
- **Skin:** Avoid sun exposure (including tanning beds). Wear SPF 30 (or higher) sun block and protective clothing such as hats, long sleeves, and long pants. Keep the area around any rash clean and dry. Check with your doctor before putting any products on your rash.
- **If you begin to have hair loss,** you may want to stop by the Resource Center (inside the Sunflower Café (cafeteria) on the 1st floor of the hospital) or call. **(716- 845-8659)** and talk about our wig and head covering program.
- **Need to talk to someone who has been through the journey you are just beginning?** The Resource Center also offers a Cancer Coach program, which matches patients with survivors who can provide practical and emotional support. (Coaches do not provide medical advice.)
- **Trouble sleeping?** Be consistent with bedtime and the time you get up. Avoid exercise and caffeine for a few hours before bed. Talk to your health care provider about other steps you can take.

When Should I Call the Doctor?

Call your doctor immediately if you have:

- signs of infection: **fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher**, chills, cough, sore throat, pain or burning upon urination; redness or tenderness along a vein, at an IV site, or at any other wound
- signs of an allergic reaction: itching, hives, swelling in your face or hands, swelling or tingling in your mouth/throat, chest tightness, trouble breathing, dizziness, or palpitations
- unusual bruising/bleeding: bleeding for more than 10-15 minutes; black or bloody stool or vomits; vomit that looks like coffee grounds; blood in your urine or mucus, unusually heavy periods, spontaneous bleeding from your gums or nose, or superficial bleeding into the skin (looks like pinpoint-sized red/purple spots)

Call your doctor as soon as possible if you have:

- diarrhea 5-6 times in 1 day, diarrhea with weakness, or a change in your normal bowel habits for more than 2 days
- nausea or vomiting that prevents you from eating or drinking
- pain in your arms or legs, headache, nausea, or vomiting that is not relieved by prescribed medication
- swelling of your hands or feet
- difficulty swallowing
- persistent loss of appetite or rapid weight loss of 5 pounds or more in 1 week
- pain in the upper right part of your stomach
- decreased urination

What Else Do I Need to Know About Gemcitabine?

- If your doctor has not restricted your fluids, drink 2-3 quarts every day. (Even more important on chemo day and for 2-3 days after.) Choose water and fluids that do not contain caffeine or alcohol.
- Keep all your lab and doctor appointments. You will need to have your blood tested regularly while getting this medicine.
- Gemcitabine may interfere with the normal menstrual cycle (period) in women and may stop sperm production in men.
- Do not get pregnant or father a child while receiving gemcitabine. Use barrier methods of contraception such as condoms. This medication may harm a fetus.
- For more information about gemcitabine, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.