

Ifosfamide

Names

The generic drug name is ifosfamide (eye-FOS-fa-mide). Ifex® is a brand name. There may be other names for this medication.

Why am I Taking Ifosfamide and How is it Given?

This drug is used to treat recurrent and germ cell testicular cancers, bladder cancer, ovarian cancer, lung cancer, cervical cancer, Hodgkin's and non-Hodgkin's lymphomas, and sarcomas, among others. Ifosfamide is given by infusion into a vein (intravenous or IV), usually over 30 minutes, for 5 days in a row. This is repeated every 3 weeks.

How Does it Work?

Cancer is a group of diseases in which abnormal cells divide without control. Both normal and cancer cells go through cycles that include a resting phase, active growing phases, and division. Your chemotherapy schedule is based upon the type of cancer you have, the rate at which the cancer cells divide, and the times when each drug is the most likely to be effective. This is why chemotherapy is typically given in cycles.

Ifosfamide is in a class of drugs known as alkylating agents, and is chemically related to nitrogen mustards. Alkylating agents are most active in the resting phase of the cell cycle.

What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin?

Tell your doctor if you:

- have had an allergic reaction to ifosfamide or have any allergies
- have or ever have had kidney, heart, or liver disease
- have had chemotherapy or radiation therapy in the past
- are taking herbal supplements, especially St John's wort
- have any condition that causes slow or poor wound healing
- are pregnant or breastfeeding

This drug may interact with other medications or cause harmful side effects. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal, or diet supplements that you are taking.

What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- Low blood counts - low levels of white blood cells and/or platelets, which can increase your risk for infection and/or bleeding
- Thin or brittle hair and/or hair loss
- Poor appetite, nausea, vomiting (Nausea and vomiting usually begins 3-6 hours after infusion and can last up to 6 days)
- Diarrhea
- Mouth or throat sores
- Fatigue, achiness
- Hemorrhagic cystitis: blood in urine, pain or burning with urination, feelings of urgency to urinate, urinating frequently, loss of bladder control (Your doctor may give you a medication called mesna to protect your bladder. See 'What Else Should I Know About Ifosfamide')
- Central nervous system symptoms (less common): Sleepiness, confusion, hallucinations

How Can I Manage These Side Effects?

- **Drink 2-3 quarts of water every day unless your doctor tells you to limit your fluids.** This is even more important in the days before and after you have chemotherapy. This will help flush the medications out and help prevent dehydration, constipation, and hemorrhagic cystitis. Try to drink a variety of fluids to help provide the calories, sodium (salt), and other electrolytes your body needs. Broths are a good source of sodium, and some sports drinks provide additional electrolytes (check the labels).
- To help avoid infections, stay away from crowds or people with colds or other infections. Wash your hands often. Talk to your doctor before you have any vaccinations, such as a flu shot.
- Be careful when handling sharp objects. Avoid rough sports or other situations that could cause bruising or injury. Use an electric razor. Be careful when using a toothbrush or dental floss (your doctor may recommend other ways to clean your teeth).
- Nausea and vomiting: To help prevent nausea, avoid fried, spicy, and fatty foods on the days you receive chemo and for 2-3 days afterwards. Eating small, frequent meals may help. If you have nausea, try foods and drinks that are 'easy on the stomach' - bland foods, ginger ale, dry crackers, and toast. Ask your doctor about other medications to treat nausea and vomiting if your current anti-nausea medication is not working well.

- Some people cut their hair or shave their head when their hair begins to fall out. Wigs and head coverings are available in the Resource Center (located inside the cafeteria on the 1st floor of the hospital). Phone: 716-845-1729.
- Mouth care is very important. Rinse your mouth with a mixture of ½ tsp of baking soda in 8 oz of water after every meal and at bedtime. Brush your teeth and gums often with a soft toothbrush. Do not smoke, or use tobacco products, alcohol, or mouthwash that contains alcohol.
- If you are fatigued, take rests during the day, limit your activities, and do an activity at a time of day when you feel a bit more energetic. Learn to ask for and accept help with daily chores.

When Should I Call the Doctor?

Call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency room if you have signs of a severe allergic reaction: Swelling/tingling in your face, mouth, tongue, or throat; chest tightness; trouble breathing; shortness of breath; dizziness; or palpitations (irregular or pounding heartbeat); hives

Call your doctor immediately if you have:

- any sign 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 or skin irritation
- confusion, hallucination, or seizures
- unusual bruising or bleeding: bleeding lasts more than 10-15 minutes or that causes dizziness; black or bloody stools; vomit that is bloody or that looks like coffee grounds; blood in your urine or phlegm /mucus, unusually heavy menstrual bleeding, spontaneous bleeding from your gums or nose, or superficial bleeding into the skin that appears as a rash of pinpoint-sized reddish-purple spots (petechiae)
- yellowing of the skin or eyes

Call your doctor as soon as possible if you have:

- nausea or vomiting that is not relieved by prescribed medication or that prevents you from eating or drinking
- signs of dehydration: tiredness, thirst, dry mouth, dark urine, decreased urination, or dizziness

What Else Should I Know About Ifosfamide?

- Ifosfamide can cause serious urinary side effects (hemorrhagic cystitis). You will be given mesna, a medication to prevent these side effects, and be required to either drink liquids** or receive fluids intravenously.
**Drink at least 8 full glasses (2-3 quarts) of liquid the day before ifosfamide, the day you get ifosfamide, and for 3 days afterwards. This is especially important if you have had chemotherapy before.
- Ifosfamide may cause severe or life-threatening kidney problems during therapy or months or years after you stop receiving treatment. Call your doctor immediately if you have decreased urination; swelling of the face, arms, hands, feet, ankles, or lower legs; or unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Do not eat large amounts of grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice while receiving this medication.
- Do not get pregnant or father a child during treatment or for a while after treatment ends. (Talk to your doctor for further details.)
- Ifosfamide may interfere with the normal menstrual cycle (period) in women and may stop sperm production in men, causing fertility problems. However, do NOT assume that you cannot get pregnant or father a child while on this medication. Use an effective method of birth control. A barrier method such as condoms or diaphragm are recommended. Ifosfamide may harm the fetus.
- Do not breastfeed.
- There is a slight risk of developing a blood cancer such as leukemia after taking ifosfamide. Talk to your doctor about this risk.
- Keep all appointments with your doctor and the lab. Your doctor will need to check your blood at regular visits.
- If you would like more information about ifosfamide, talk to your doctor.