

# Vinblastine

Names	The generic drug name is vinblastine (vin-BLAS-teen). Velban® is a brand name. There may be other names for this medication.
Why am I Taking Vinblastine?	Vinblastine is used to treat lymphomas melanoma, soft tissue sarcomas, and cancers of the testicles, breast, lung, head and neck, and bladder
How is Vinblastine Given?	<p>This medication is given by infusion into a vein (intravenous or IV). Vinblastine is a vesicant, a chemical that causes extensive tissue damage and blistering if it escapes from the vein. <b>If you notice pain, redness or swelling at the IV site while you are receiving vinblastine, alert your health care professional immediately.</b></p>
How Does it Work?	<p>Cancers are diseases in which abnormal cells reproduce uncontrollably. Chemo medications identify and attack cancer cells because they reproduce quickly. Some cells in your body normally reproduce quickly and those cells are most likely to be damaged /destroyed by chemo. These normal cells will eventually grow back and be healthy. During treatment, however, you may experience side effects . Your chemo schedule is based upon your cancer type, how fast the cancer cells reproduce, and when (in the cell cycle) the drugs are most effective.</p> <p>Vinblastine is a type of plant alkaloid called a vinca alkaloid. It attacks the cancer cells during specific stages of the cell cycle.</p>
What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin Vinblastine?	<p>Tell your doctor if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• are allergic to vinblastine</li><li>• have any kind of infection</li><li>• have or have ever had heart or blood vessel disease (including varicose veins), lung disease, or liver disease</li><li>• are pregnant or breastfeeding</li></ul> <p><b>These drugs can interact with other medications. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal, or diet supplements that you take.</b></p>

## What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- Low blood counts: Decreased white blood cells, red blood cells, and/or platelets, increasing your risk for infection, fatigue, bleeding
- Fatigue, weakness
- Nausea and vomiting - usually lasting less than 24 hours – loss of appetite
- Diarrhea
- Constipation (usually 1-3 days after treatment)
- Mouth sores, taste changes, metallic taste in your mouth
- Headache; jaw, joint, muscle pain
- Depression
- High blood pressure
- Skin may be very sensitive to sunlight (photosensitivity)
- Hair loss (usually temporary)
- Numbness, tingling in your fingers and toes (peripheral neuropathy)

## 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 on the days before and after you take these medications. This will help flush the medications out and help prevent dehydration and constipation.
- **Low white blood cell count:** 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.
- **Low red blood cell count/fatigue:** 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 household and daily chores.
- **Low platelet count:** 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 and gums).
- **Nausea/vomiting:** To help prevent nausea, avoid fried, spicy, and/or fatty foods on the days you receive chemo and for 2-3 days afterwards. Eating small, frequent meals may help. If you feel nauseous, try foods and drinks that are 'easy on the stomach' or made you feel better when you were sick in the past. These generally include bland foods, ginger ale, dry crackers, and toast. Take prescribed anti-nausea medication as soon as you feel nauseous.

- **Constipation:** It is important to avoid constipation for several days after getting this medicine. To help prevent constipation, Get out of bed, walk, and get plenty of fiber in your diet from grains, vegetables, fruit, or supplements. If you do not move your bowels in 2-3 days, check with your doctor before you use laxatives. Talk with your doctor about what to do if you are constipated.
- **Diarrhea:** Loperamide (Imodium®) is available over the counter. Your doctor will tell you if and when to take this medication. Do not take more than 8 tablets (16mg) in a 24-hour period. Call the clinic if not better within 24 hours.
- **Mouth care:** To minimize mouth problems, 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 a soft toothbrush. (Soften it further by running it under warm water). Avoid smoking, alcohol, and mouthwashes that contain alcohol.
- **Skin Care:** Use sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher when you are outdoors, even for a short time. Wear sunglasses, wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved shirts, and pants. Keep your neck, chest, and back covered. Do not use tanning beds. If you get a rash, keep the area clean and dry, and your doctor right away.
- **Hair loss:** Some people cut their hair for their own comfort once it begins to fall out. You can get a free wig and head covering in the Resource Center for Patients and Families, located in the Sunflower Café (cafeteria) on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the hospital. Open 9-5, Monday – Friday. Call **716-845-1729**
- Monitor your fingers and toes and report any sensation changes to your doctor. **If you develop peripheral neuropathy:**
  - Stay as active as you can to help keep your muscles working. If you exercise in a gym, tell the instructor that you have peripheral neuropathy and ask for instructions.
  - Foot and hand massages may help relieve stiffness. After the massage, remember to clean the lotions and creams off your hands and feet.
  - Protect your heads and feet, particularly when handling hot items or when weather is severe. Use oven mitts, gloves, socks, and shoes.
  - Have someone check the water temperature before you take a shower, wash dishes, etc. or use a thermometer or a part of your body that is not affected by PN.

- Get rid of throw rugs and other obstacles that can increase your risk of falling or tripping.
- Ask about balance training and/or physical or occupational therapy
- Talk to your doctor or nurse about obtaining a wig before you experience hair loss.

#### When Should I Call the Doctor?

##### **Call your doctor immediately if you have:**

- signs of an allergic reaction: Itching, hives, dizziness, or palpitations.  
**Call 911 or go to nearest ER if you have swelling or tingling in your face, mouth, or throat or trouble breathing**
- 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 or skin irritation
- 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)
- severe, persistent headache or belly pain
- urinary retention (you cannot pee)

##### **Call your doctor as soon as possible if you have:**

- painful mouth or throat that makes it difficult to eat or drink
- nausea that is not relieved by prescribed medication or that prevents you from eating or drinking
- more than 4 episodes of vomiting or diarrhea in 24 hours
- severe constipation that is not relieved with laxatives
- feeling dizzy or faint, especially when changing from a sitting to a standing position

#### What Else Should I Know About Vinblastine?

- Vinblastine may stop sperm production in men and interfere with the normal menstrual cycle in women. **Do not** assume, however, that you cannot get pregnant or father a child while on vinblastine. Both men and women should use a reliable method of birth control to prevent pregnancy. A barrier method, such as condoms, is recommended. This drug may have harmful effects on a fetus.

Genetic counseling is available for you to discuss the effect of this drug therapy on any future pregnancies.

- This medication may cause depression in some people. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you feel you need help with your mood.
- If you would like more information about vinblastine, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.