

Vincristine

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| Names | The generic drug name is vincristine (vin-KRIS-teen). Oncovin® and Vincasar® are brand names. There may be other names for this medication. |
| How is it Given? | Your medicine will be given by infusion into a vein (intravenous or IV). |
| Why Is Vincristine Used? | Vincristine is used to treat many types of cancer including leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma, sarcoma, neuroblastoma, Wilms' tumor, thyroid cancer, and brain tumors. |
| How Does it Work? | <p>Cancer is a group of diseases in which abnormal cells divide (reproduce) without control. Both normal and cancer cells go through a cell cycle of phases - resting, growing, and division.</p> <p>Your chemotherapy (chemo) schedule is based upon your type of cancer, how fast they grow and reproduce, and when in the cell cycle each drug is the most effective. This is why chemo is typically given in cycles.</p> <p>The faster cells are dividing, the more likely it is that chemo will damage/kill them. Chemo, unfortunately, does not know the difference between cancer cells and normal cells that reproduce quickly. This means chemo may affect the cells in bone marrow, hair follicles, and that line your digestive tract (mouth, stomach, and intestines). These normal cells will eventually grow back and be healthy. During treatment, however, you may have side effects.</p> <p>Vincristine is a type of plant alkaloid called a <i>vinca alkaloid</i>. It attacks structures inside the cells that are needed for reproduction. If the cells are unable to divide, they die.</p> |

What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin?

Tell your doctor if you:

- are allergic to vincristine or have any allergies
- are taking aspirin, itraconazole (Sponanox®), or vitamins
- have ever had heart, liver, nerve, or muscle disease
- are pregnant or breastfeeding

This drug 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 are taking.

What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- Bone marrow depression (decreased red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets) increasing your risk of anemia, infections, and bleeding
- Fatigue, weakness
- Constipation, diarrhea
- Nausea, vomiting, stomach pain and cramps, weight loss
- Thin or brittle hair, hair loss
- Changes in taste, mouth or throat sores
- Jaw pain, headache, or other aches
- Exposed skin may be more sensitive to sunlight (photosensitivity)

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).

- **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.
- **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.
- **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 1st floor of the hospital. Open 9-5, Monday – Friday. Call **716-845-1729**
- **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.
- **Headaches, aches, pains:** Talk to your health care provider before using any medications or herbal products for these - or any other - symptoms
- **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.

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 abdominal, muscle cramping, or a change in your normal bowel habits for more than 2 days
- tingling, numbness, and cramping in the legs or arms for longer than a few days; difficulty walking; or vision problems

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
- swelling of feet and ankles

What Else Should I Know About Vincristine?

- Vincristine can stop sperm production in men and interfere with the normal menstrual cycle in women. Do not assume that you cannot get pregnant or father a child while you are taking this medication. Both men and women should use a reliable method of birth control to prevent pregnancy. 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.
- Do not use aspirin or any product that has aspirin in it (such as some cold medicines) unless you have talk to your doctor first.
- If you would like more information, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

