

Altretamine

Names

The generic drug name is altretamine (al-tret' a meen). The brand name is Hexalen®. There may be other names for this medication.

How is it Administered?

This medication comes as a capsule. It is taken by mouth, usually 4 times a day – after breakfast, lunch, dinner, and at bedtime. Take it around the same time every day. This drug may be taken for 14 or 21 days. (Your doctor or pharmacist will discuss your schedule with you.)

If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember it. However, if it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and return to your regular schedule. **Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed one.**

Keep this medication in its original container and store it at room temperature and away from excess heat and moisture (not in the bathroom).

Why Am I Taking Altretamine?

This medication is used to treat women who have ovarian cancer that has not improved or that has worsened after treatment with other medications. It may be used to treat other types of cancer.

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.

Altretamine is in a class of drugs known as alkylating agents. It works by slowing or stopping the growth of cancer cells in your body.

What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin?

Tell your doctor if you:

- have ever had an allergic reaction to altretamine or any other drug
- have nervous system or blood disorders
- 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, or supplements that you take.

What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

Important things to remember about side effects.

- Side effects are usually temporary and go away after treatment ends.
- Most people do not have all of the side effects listed for a medication.
- We can often prescribe medication to lessen the severity of side effects.
- Having side effects, and the severity of your side effects, does not have a relationship to how well your chemotherapy is working.

Common side effects

- **Low blood counts:** A drop in white blood cells (WBCs), red blood cells (RBCs), and platelets can increase your risks of infection, anemia/ fatigue, and bleeding problems
- Nausea, vomiting
- **Peripheral neuropathy:** Numbness, tingling, or decreased sensation in fingers or toes

Less common side effects

- Loss of appetite, stomach cramping or pain
- Dizziness, sleepiness, or weakness
- Mood changes, agitation, and depression
- Diarrhea

How Can I Manage These Side Effects?

- **Low blood counts:** Stay away from crowds or people with colds or other infections, wash your hands often, and talk to your doctor before you have any vaccinations. Eat well and stay out of bed as much as possible during your treatment to stay strong. If you feel fatigued, take rest periods throughout the day, and try to limit your activities. Be careful handling sharp objects, avoid situations where you may be injured, and use an electric razor.
- **Nausea, 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.
- **Peripheral neuropathy:** Report any numbness or tingling to your doctor right away. If you develop peripheral neuropathy:
 - Stay as active as you can to help keep your muscles working. If you go to a gym, tell the instructor that you have peripheral neuropathy.
 - 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.
- **Loss of appetite:** Stay active - try to take a short walk every day. Have a healthy snack every few hours instead of 3 large meals. Avoid foods with strong smells. Try a small amount of food on a small plate and eat foods at room temperature. Eat and snack on a schedule – even if you don't feel hungry. Choose high protein, high calorie foods. Add protein powder. Choose moist or smooth foods such as pureed fruits – avoid spicy, greasy, heavy foods and foods high in salt or sugar.
- **Aches and pains:** Check with your doctor before taking any medication or product for this or any other side effect.
- **Diarrhea:** Avoid greasy, fatty, and fried foods; raw vegetables; skins, seeds, and stringy fibers of unpeeled fruits; high fiber vegetables (broccoli, corn, dried beans, peas, and cauliflower) – even if they are cooked; high sugar foods; very hot or very cold foods/drinks; caffeine; alcohol; and tobacco products. Be careful with milk and other dairy products, they may make diarrhea worse. Ask your doctor if you can take loperamide (Imodium®), which is available over the counter.

Please note: If you moderate to severe vomiting or diarrhea, you are at risk for dehydration. To prevent dehydration, **drink 2-3 quarts of water every day unless your doctor tells you to limit your fluids.**
- If you are having **mood changes** or problems with anxiety or depression, talk with your doctor.
- **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 (run it under warm water). Avoid smoking, alcohol, and mouthwashes that contain alcohol.

When Should I
Call the
Doctor?

Call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency department if you have life-threatening symptoms such as signs of severe allergic reaction: Swelling or tingling in your face, tongue, mouth, or throat; chest tightness; wheezing; trouble breathing or swallowing; dizziness, shortness of breath; heart palpitations; or hives.

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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
- any sign of 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 mucus, nosebleeds, or superficial bleeding into the skin that appears as a rash of pinpoint-sized reddish-purple spots (petechiae)
- signs of nerve damage: pain, burning, numbness, or tingling in the hands or feet; weakness in the arms or legs; or loss of ability to move your arms or legs; changes in mood; or loss of consciousness or coordination

Call your doctor as soon as possible if you have:

- nausea that is not relieved by medication or that prevents you from eating or drinking
- vomiting more than 4-5 times in 24 hours
- diarrhea of more than 4-6 episodes in 24 hours
- persistent loss of appetite or loss of 5 pounds in one week

What Else Do I
Need to Know
About
Altretamine?

- Altretamine may cause severe nerve damage. If you experience any of the following symptoms, call your doctor immediately if you have signs of nerve damage (see When to Call the Doctor)
- Take altretamine exactly as directed. Do not take it more or less often. Do not stop taking it without talking to your doctor.
- Keep all appointments with your doctor and the lab.
- Do not use aspirin unless you have talked to your doctor.
- This drug may cause menstrual irregularities or cessation in women and interfere with sperm production in men, causing sterility. Do NOT, however, assume you cannot get pregnant or father a child while on this medication. Use an effective method of birth control during treatment and for a while afterwards. Barrier methods such as condoms or diaphragms are recommended. This drug may be harmful to the fetus.
- Do not breastfeed.
- Do not drink alcohol while taking this medication, it may cause nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, headaches, sweating, and flushing in the face.
- If you would like more information, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.