

# Cetuximab

Names	The generic drug name is cetuximab (si-TUK-si-mab). Erbitux® is a brand name. There may be other names for this medication.
How is Cetuximab Administered?	Your medicine will be given by injection into a vein (intravenous, IV), usually in your arm, wrist, hand or chest.
What is it Used For?	This drug is used to treat colon cancer that has spread (metastasized), squamous cell cancer of the head and neck, squamous cell skin cancer, and non-small cell lung cancer.
What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin?	<p>Tell your doctor if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• have had an allergic reaction to cetuximab, murine proteins, or any component of this product. (Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you don't know whether a medication that you are allergic to is made from murine proteins)</li><li>• have or have ever had lung, heart, or arterial disease</li><li>• have lower than normal levels of magnesium, potassium, or calcium in your blood</li><li>• are pregnant or breastfeeding</li></ul> <p><b>This drug may interact with other medications. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about <u>all</u> prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal, or diet supplements that you are taking.</b></p>
How Does it Work?	<p>Cetuximab is a monoclonal antibody, a type of immunotherapy. You may also hear it called targeted therapy because it targets cancer cells by identifying a feature on the cancer cells that makes it different from normal, healthy cells. (Traditional chemotherapy drugs work by attacking any/all cells that are reproducing rapidly.)</p> <p>Cetuximab attaches to a protein on the surface of the cancer cells called EGFR (Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor). This interferes with that cell's ability to grow and multiply, and the cell dies.</p>

### What Are Some Possible Side Effects I May Experience?

- Skin and nail changes: acne like rash (usually occurs in 1st or 2<sup>nd</sup> week of treatment), dry/cracking skin, skin peeling, redness, itchiness, and/or inflammation of skin (particularly around finger and toe nails)
- Sensitivity to sun (photosensitivity) – skin and eyes
- Fatigue, weakness, sleep problems, headache
- Low white blood cell count (increases your risk of infection)
- Loss of appetite, heartburn, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or constipation (persistent vomiting or diarrhea increases your risk of dehydration)
- Mouth and throat sores, dry mouth, chapped lips, difficulty swallowing
- Numbness, tingling in hands, feet, arms, legs (peripheral neuropathy)
- Cough
- Fever, chills

### How Can I Manage These Side Effects?

- Keep skin clean and dry.
- If you develop a rash, tell your doctor or nurse right away. Do not put anything on the rash unless your doctor approves it.
- Avoid unnecessary or prolonged exposure to sunlight. Wear protective clothing a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen with SPF of 30 or higher during treatment and for 2 months afterwards.
- Use non-cosmetic moisturizers on palms of hands and soles of feet.
- 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.
- Ask your doctor about medication to help prevent or lessen nausea, vomiting, headache, or heartburn.
- 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.
- Drink 2-3 quarts a day (especially water) unless otherwise directed by your doctor.
- Check with your doctor or nurse before you use enemas, laxatives, or suppositories for constipation.
- To minimize mouth problems, rinse your mouth with a mixture of ½ teaspoon of baking soda and 8 ounces of water after meals 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.

When Should I  
Call the  
Doctor?

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

- any sign of infection: fever of 100.5°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 an allergic reaction: itching, hives, chest tightness, trouble breathing, wheezing, or swelling in your face, mouth, or hands,
- chest pain, feeling of heaviness in chest
- chest pain, dry cough, or if you are coughing up blood

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

- diarrhea 4 times in 1 day or diarrhea with weakness
- stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, or loss of appetite not relieved by prescribed medication headache
- blistering, peeling, red skin rash
- signs of dehydration: tiredness, thirsty, dry mouth, dizziness, dark urine, decrease in the amount of urine
- numbness, tingling, or burning in your hands, arms, legs, or feet

What Else  
Should I Know  
About  
Cetuximab?

- Cetuximab may cause severe or life-threatening *infusion reactions*. Most commonly occurs with the first dose, but may occur at any time during treatment. Your doctor will watch you carefully during treatment and for 1 hour afterward. Tell your doctor/nurse if you have any of the allergic reaction symptoms. If you do, your doctor will stop your infusion, treat the symptoms, and discontinue cetuximab.
- People with head and neck cancer who are treated with radiation therapy and cetuximab may have an increased risk of having a heart attack (cardiopulmonary arrest). Tell your doctor if you have or have ever had coronary artery disease, angina, a heart attack, congestive heart failure, irregular heartbeat, other heart disease, or lower than normal levels of magnesium, potassium, or calcium in your blood.
- Keep all appointments with your doctor and the laboratory.
- Do not get pregnant or father a child while on cetuximab. Use effective birth control, a barrier method such as condoms is recommended during treatment and for 6 months after treatment ends. If you become pregnant while using cetuximab, call your doctor.
- Do not breastfeed during treatment or for 60 days afterwards.
- If you would like more information about cetuximab, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.