

# Alemtuzumab

**Names** Alemtuzumab (a-lem-too-ZOO-mab) is the generic drug name. The brand name is Campath®. There may be other names for this medication.

**How is it Administered?** Your medicine will be given slowly by injection into a vein (IV or intravenous).

**What is it Used For?** This drug is used to treat B-cell chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL).

**How Does it Work?** Alemtuzumab is not a traditional chemotherapy medication. It is a monoclonal antibody, a type of targeted therapy.

Traditional chemotherapy drugs identify cancer cells by their rapid rate of reproduction, and then they attack those cells. Unfortunately, there are also cells in our bodies that normally reproduce rapidly. These cells are also affected by chemotherapy drugs, resulting in side effects such as nausea, vomiting, and hair loss.

Alemtuzumab is designed to work differently. It targets CD52, an antigen found on B cells and T cells (types of white blood cells that help fight infections and other “foreign invaders”). Once the alemtuzumab attaches to the CD 52, your body’s immune system attacks and destroys those cells. Unfortunately, some healthy B and T cells are also destroyed, which weakens your immune system, potentially seriously. During this time, you must take special precautions to prevent infection.

**What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin Receiving Alemtuzumab?**

Tell your doctor if you:

- have had an allergic reaction to alemtuzumab
- have heart disease or any other medical condition
- are pregnant or breastfeeding

**These drugs can interact with other medications. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all prescription and/ or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal, or diet supplements that you are taking.**

## What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- Low blood counts - decreased number of white blood cells, red blood cells, or platelets (higher risk of infection, fatigue, or bleeding)
- Loss of appetite, nausea, and/or vomiting
- Infection
- Sweating
- Muscle, abdominal, chest, or back pain; headache Cough, bronchitis
- Numbness (neuropathy) or swelling (edema) in hands or feet
- Mouth sores
- Weakness, dizziness
- Diarrhea
- Sleep problems, anxiety

## How Can I Manage These Side Effects?

- 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. Take any medications prescribed to lower the risk of infection.
- 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.
- To help prevent bleeding: Be careful when handling sharp objects. Avoid rough sports or other situations that could cause bruising or injury. Use an electric razor.
- Skin Care: Avoid sun exposure. Wear sunblock with SPF 15 or higher and protective clothing and hats. Avoid tanning beds.
- Be sure to take antibiotic and antiviral medicines as prescribed. If you have trouble taking all of your doses, call your doctor immediately.
- Ask your doctor about medication to help prevent or lessen nausea, vomiting, headache, and diarrhea.
- **Mouth care: Very Important while taking this drug.** 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.
- Drink 3-4 quarts of water a day.
- Avoid foods that may increase your risk of infection: raw, unwashed fruits and vegetables; unpasteurized juices or dairy products; and undercooked meat, poultry, eggs, or fish

When Should I  
Call the  
Doctor?

**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 an allergic reaction: itching or hives, swelling in your face or hands, swelling or tingling in your mouth or throat, chest tightness, trouble breathing, dizziness, or palpitations
- 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 headache

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

- diarrhea of 5-6 stools in 1 day or diarrhea with weakness
- nausea or vomiting not relieved by prescribed medication or that prevents you from eating or drinking
- rapid weight changes of 5 pounds or more in 1 week
- tingling, pain, or burning in your feet or hands
- extreme fatigue that interferes with normal activities

What Else  
Should I Know  
About  
Alemtuzumab?

- During a treatment, **let your nurse know immediately** if you have:
  - shortness of breath
  - rash or itching
  - dizziness or lightheadedness
  - palpitations (feeling your heart beat rapidly)
- This drug may harm an unborn child. Both men and women should use 2 effective methods of birth control during your treatment and for 6 months afterwards. If you are pregnant, talk to your doctor before you start your treatments. Genetic counseling is available for you to discuss the effect of this drug therapy on any future pregnancies.
- Do not breastfeed during treatment or for at least 3 months afterwards.
- Keep all of your lab and doctor appointments.
- If you would like more information about alemtuzumab, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.