

# Irinotecan

Names	The generic drug name is irinotecan (eye-ri-noe-TEE-kan). The brand name is Camptosar®. There may be other names for this medication, including CPT-11.
How is it Administered?	Your medicine will be given by injection into a vein (intravenously or IV). The infusion takes about 90 minutes.
What is it Used For?	This drug is used to treat cancer of the colon or rectum that has spread (metastasized). It may be used in the treatment of other types of cancer.
How Does it Work?	<p>Cancer is a group of diseases in which abnormal cells reproduce without control. Your chemo schedule is based upon your cancer type, how fast the cancer cells multiply, and the time of the cells' reproductive cycle when the medication is the most likely to be effective. This is why chemotherapy is typically given in cycles.</p> <p>Irinotecan is an <i>antineoplastic</i> or <i>cytotoxic</i> chemotherapy. It stops the growth of cells that reproduce very quickly. Many of these cells are cancerous. Unfortunately, normal cells that reproduce quickly are also harmed, such as cells in the blood, gastrointestinal tract, hair, and skin. These normal cells will eventually grow back and be healthy.</p> <p>Irinotecan is a type of plant alkaloid called a podophyllotoxin or a topoisomerase inhibitor. It attacks the cancer cells during specific stages of the cell cycle. If the cells are unable to divide, they die.</p>
What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin Irinotecan?	<p>Tell your doctor if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• are allergic to irinotecan, sorbitol, or any other medications</li><li>• have or have ever had a bowel obstruction (blockage in your intestine)</li><li>• have or have ever had diabetes; fructose intolerance (inability to digest the natural sugar found in fruit); or liver, lung, or kidney disease</li><li>• are taking ketoconazole or St. John's wort, medications for seizures</li><li>• are pregnant or breastfeeding</li></ul> <p><b>This drug may interact with other medications or cause harmful side effects. Tell your doctor/pharmacist about <u>all</u> prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal or diet supplements that you take.</b></p>

## What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- **Early diarrhea (during the first 24 hours after treatment):** runny nose, increased saliva, shrinking pupils, watery eyes, sweating, flushing, stomach cramps, and diarrhea. If any of these symptoms occur, tell your nurse right away and medication can be given to stop or lessen these side effects.
- **Late diarrhea (more than 24 hours after treatment):** occurs between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> day after treatment. Diarrhea can be severe, causing high losses of fluids and electrolytes, which can result in dehydration, infection, and other problems. Because of these risks, it is important to stay in touch with your doctors and nurses for monitoring, and medication and diet instructions.
- Loss of appetite, heartburn, nausea, vomiting, or constipation
- Low blood counts (increased risk of infection, fatigue, or bleeding)
- Hair loss or thinning
- Swelling or sores in your mouth
- Weakness and/or sleepiness
- Pain, especially back pain
- Fever

## 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 in the days before and after you have chemotherapy. This will help flush the medications out and help prevent dehydration and constipation. Try to drink a variety of fluids to help provide the calories, sodium (salt), and other electrolytes your body needs. Broths are a good source of sodium, and some sports drinks provide additional electrolytes (check the labels).
- **Diarrhea:** Loperamide (Imodium®) is available over the counter. You can take 2 tablets after the first episode of diarrhea, followed by 1 tablet (2mg) after each loose stool as needed. Do not take more than 8 tablets (16mg) in a 24-hour period. Call the clinic if this does not provide relief within 24 hours.
- **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.
- To help avoid infections, stay away from people with colds, flu, or other infections. Talk to your doctor before you have any vaccinations. Wash your hands often.

- 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.
- Hair loss: Some people cut their hair for their own comfort once it begins to fall out. Hair will grow back once chemo is over, but it may have a different color or texture. You can get a wig in the Resource Center for Patients and Families; call **716-845-1729**.
- Infertility, birth defects: Though chemo may affect fertility, do not assume you cannot get pregnant or father a child when receiving chemo. Both men and women should use effective, reliable birth control. Barrier methods, such as condoms and diaphragms, are recommended. This drug may be harmful to a fetus.
- Do not breastfeed while receiving chemotherapy. Talk to your doctor for further details.
- Skin care, photosensitivity: You may be more sensitive to sunlight, take extra care to avoid sun exposure. Use a sunblock with SPF 30 or higher that protects against both UVA and UVB rays when you are outdoors, even if it is just for a short time. Keep your neck, chest, and back covered. Wear sunglasses and protective clothes (brimmed hat, long sleeves, etc.) when in the sun. Do not use tanning beds. If you develop a rash, keep the area clean and dry and check with your doctor before using any creams or ointments on the area.
- Fever, aches and pains: Check with your doctor before taking any medication or product for this or any other side effect.
- Keep all your doctor and lab appointments. Tell your doctor about any side effects you have.
- If you have questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

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.

Please let us know if you go to the emergency room or are admitted to the hospital.

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

- diarrhea that does not stop within 24 hours or is accompanied by lightheadedness, dizziness, or fainting; or severe nausea and vomiting that stops you from drinking anything
- 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
- signs of dehydration: fainting, dizziness, dark color urine, lightheadedness
- 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)
- swollen stomach, unexpected or unusual weight gain
- sudden or severe headache, problems with vision, speech, or walking

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

- decrease in how much or how often you urinate
- extreme tiredness that interferes with normal activities
- yellowing of the skin or eyes

**What Else Should I Know About Irinotecan?**

- Irinotecan may make you dizzy or affect your vision, especially during the first 24 hours after a treatment. Do not drive a car or operate machinery until you know how it affects you.
- Do not take St. John's wort or drink grapefruit juice for 2 weeks before you begin treatment with irinotecan.
- Talk with your doctor about how to cope with "late diarrhea" before treatment begins. If your doctor tells you to keep loperamide (Imodium AD®) on hand, be sure to follow your doctor's directions since they may be different. Your doctor will also tell you which foods you should eat and which foods you should avoid. Drink plenty of fluids.
- Call your doctor right away the first time you have diarrhea during your treatment.
- Do not use enemas or laxatives unless your doctor gives permission.
- Do not become pregnant, father a child, or breastfeed while you are receiving irinotecan. Irinotecan may harm the fetus. Use barrier methods of birth control such as condoms and diaphragms.