Paclitaxel (PAK-li-tax-el)

Brand Names
Taxol®, Onxal™ (There may be other names for this medication.)

How is it Administered?
Your medication will be given by injection into a vein (intravenous or IV), usually in your arm, wrist, hand or chest.

Why am I Taking Paclitaxel?
Paclitaxel treats cancers of breast, ovary, lung, and prostate; melanoma; and other solid tumor cancers.

How Does it Work?
Cancers are diseases in which abnormal cells reproduce uncontrollably. Your chemo schedule is based upon:
• your cancer type and how fast the cancer cells reproduce
• the phase of the cell cycle when the chemo is most effective – the resting, growing, or reproduction phases

With these factors in mind, your doctors create a chemo schedule to give each medication when it will do the most damage to the cancer cells.

Paclitaxel is in a class of drugs known as taxanes or plant alkaloids. Many chemo medications identify and attack cancer cells because they reproduce quickly. Taxanes interfere with reproduction. If the cancer cells are unable to multiply, they die. Some cells in your body normally reproduce quickly and they are likely to be damaged/destroyed by chemo. These normal cells will eventually grow back and be healthy. During treatment, however, you may experience side effects from chemo’s effects on these cells.

What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin Receiving Paclitaxel?
Tell your doctor if you:
• are allergic to paclitaxel or any other medications
• have or ever have had liver or heart disease
• are pregnant or breastfeeding

This medication may interact with other medications, increasing or decreasing their effectiveness or causing harmful side effects. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal or diet supplements that you are taking.
What Are Some Possible Side Effects I May Experience?

- Hypersensitivity reaction (usually occurs within 10 minutes of starting the infusion). Your doctor will order medications for you to have before your paclitaxel infusion; this will help prevent an allergic reaction. **Notify your nurse immediately if you have fever, facial flushing, chills, shortness of breath, or hives.**
- Bone marrow depression causing low levels of white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets, which can increase your risk for infection, fatigue, and bleeding
- Hair loss
- Muscle pain (myalgia) and/or joint pain (arthritis)
- Mouth or throat sores
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness upon rising from a lying down position, weakness
- (Skin) sensitivity to the sun

How Can I Manage These Side Effects

- 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.
- 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. Learn to ask for and accept help with household and daily chores.
- Be careful when handling sharp objects. Avoid rough sports or other situations that could cause bruising or injury. Use an electric razor.
- Talk to your nurse about getting a wig before you have hair loss.
- Check with your doctor before taking any over-the-counter pain relievers for muscle or joint aches.
- Mouth care is very important. To minimize mouth problems, 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. (Soften it further by running it under warm water). Avoid smoking, alcohol, and mouthwashes that contain alcohol.
- Ask your doctor about medication to help prevent or lessen nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Drink at least 2-3 quarts of fluid, especially water, every 24 hours, unless your doctor tells you to limit your fluids.
- To avoid dizziness when rising, get up slowly and rest your feet on the floor for a few minutes before standing up.
- Use sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher when you are outdoors, even for a short time. Wear wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved shirts, and pants. Keep your neck, chest, and back covered.
If you develop a rash, do not put anything on it unless your doctor approves it.

**When Should I Call the Doctor?**

**Call your doctor immediately if you experience:**
- 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 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)
- Pale, blistering, or peeling skin

**Call your doctor as soon as possible if you have:**
- numbness or tingling in hands or feet, changes in the way you walk, clumsiness in buttoning clothes or other routine activities
- joint or muscle pain not relieved by prescribed medication
- nausea, mouth sores, or diarrhea not controlled by prescribed medication or that prevents you from eating or drinking
- diarrhea more than 4 times in 24 hours or diarrhea with weakness
- swelling in your hands, feet, or ankles

**What Else Should I Know About Paclitaxel?**
- If you notice the IV site has become red, painful, or warm to the touch, put a warm cloth on the area and call your doctor
- Tell all your doctors and dentists you are taking paclitaxel.
- Taxol contains alcohol. Do not drive a car or operate machinery until you know how this medication affects you.
- Talk to your doctor about eating grapefruit and drinking grapefruit juice while using this medication.
- You should not get pregnant or father a child while you are using paclitaxel. Paclitaxel may harm the fetus. Use an effective method of birth control to prevent pregnancy.
- Keep all appointments with your doctor and the laboratory.
- If you would like more information about paclitaxel, talk to your doctor.