

## Medication Information Sheet

**pemetrexed** (peh-meh-TREX-edd)

*This document provides general information about your medication. It does not replace the advice of your health care professional. Always discuss your therapy with your health care professional and refer to the package insert for more details.*

**Other Name:** Alimta®

**Appearance:** Colourless solution mixed into larger bags of fluids

**What is this medication for?**

- For treating certain cancers such as a type of lung cancer called non-small cell lung cancer and a type of cancer inside the lining of the chest cavity called mesothelioma.

**What should I do before I have this medication?**

- Tell your health care team if you have or had significant medical condition(s), especially if you have / had:
  - ◊ kidney, liver or heart problems
  - ◊ radiation therapy or
  - ◊ any allergies.
- To lower the chance of other side effects, your health care team will prescribe oral folic acid and vitamin B12 given by injection. You need to start these at least 5-7 days before your first pemetrexed dose, continue during treatment and until at least 21 days after the last treatment.
- To lower the chances of getting skin reactions, you will be given a corticosteroid (such as dexamethasone) to take for a few days. You need to start this the day before each pemetrexed treatment.

**Remember to:**

- Tell your health care team about all of the other medications you are taking.
- Keep taking other medications that have been prescribed for you, unless you have been told not to by your health care team.

## How will this medication affect sex, pregnancy and breastfeeding?

- The use of this medication in men or women may cause harm to the unborn baby if pregnancy occurs. Let your health care team know if you or your partner is pregnant, becomes pregnant during treatment, or if you are breastfeeding
- If there is ANY chance that you or your partner may become pregnant, you and your partner together must:
  - ► Use 2 effective forms of birth control at the same time while taking this drug. Keep using birth control until 6 months after the last dose (general recommendation). Discuss with your healthcare team.
- Do not breastfeed while on pemetrexed treatment.
- This medication may affect fertility (ability to have a baby).

## How is this medication given?

- This drug is given through an IV (injected into a vein) . Talk to your health care team about your treatment schedule.
- If you forget to take your premedications (folic acid, vitamin B12 or dexamethasone) or miss your pemetrexed treatment appointment, contact your health care team to find out what to do.

## What else do I need to know while on this medication?

- This medication can interact with other medications and can result in the treatment not working as well or cause severe side effects.
- Make sure your health care team knows about all your medications (prescription, over-the-counter, herbals and supplements). Check with your health care team before starting or stopping any of them.
- **For mild aches and pain or fever:**
  - If you feel unwell, take your temperature before taking any medications for pain or fever. They may hide a fever.
  - You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) tablets. Ask your health care team about the right dose for you.
  - Do not take anti-inflammatory medications (such as ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®), naproxen (Aleve®) or Aspirin®) for 5 days before and 2 days after pemetrexed. They can make your side effects worse. Talk to your health care team before you start or stop these medications.

- **Talk to your health care team or go to the closest emergency room right away if you have a fever.** See the [Fever](#) pamphlet for more information.
- Take your premedications (including folic acid, vitamin B12 and corticosteroids) exactly as directed by your health care team.
- Drinking alcohol and smoking during your treatment may increase some side effects and make your medication less effective. Speak to your health care team about smoking and drinking alcohol while on treatment.

## What are the side effects of this medication?

The following table lists side effects that you may have when getting pemetrexed. The table is set up to list the most common side effects first and the least common last.

It is unlikely that you will have all of the side effects listed and you may have some that are not listed. Read over the side effect table so that you know what to look for and when to get help. Refer to this table if you experience any side effects while on pemetrexed.

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
<b>Common Side Effects (25-49 out of 100 people)</b>	
<b>Fatigue (tiredness)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be active and aim to get 30 minutes of moderate exercise (you are able to talk comfortably while exercising) on most days. Check with your health care team before starting any new exercise.</li> <li>• Pace yourself, do not rush. Put off less important activities. Rest when you need to.</li> <li>• Eat well and stay hydrated by drinking at least 6 to 8 glasses of water or other liquids every day (unless your doctor told you to drink more or less).</li> <li>• Avoid driving or using machinery if you are feeling tired</li> </ul> <p>See our <a href="#">Fatigue</a> pamphlet for more information.</p>	<p>Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe</p>
<b>Nausea and vomiting (generally mild)</b> <p>May occur in hours to days after your treatment.</p> <p><b>If you have nausea or vomiting:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take anti-nausea medication(s) as prescribed to you by your doctor.</li> <li>• Drink clear liquids and have small meals. Get fresh air and rest.</li> <li>• Do not eat spicy, fried foods or foods with a strong smell.</li> <li>• Limit caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea) and alcohol.</li> </ul>	<p>Contact your healthcare team if nausea lasts more than 48 hours or vomiting lasts more than 24 hours</p>

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
<b>Common Side Effects (25-49 out of 100 people)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact your health care team if the prescribed anti-nausea medications are not helping to control your nausea and vomiting.</li> </ul> <p>Also see <a href="#">Nausea &amp; Vomiting</a> pamphlet for more information.</p>	

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
<b>Less Common Side Effects (10-24 out of 100 people)</b>	
<b>Low appetite</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may not feel like eating or you may lose weight.</li> <li>Try to eat foods that you like and eat small meals throughout the day.</li> <li>You may need to take meal supplements to help keep your weight up.</li> <li>Talk to your health care team if you have a low appetite.</li> <li>See our <a href="#">Loss of appetite</a> pamphlet for more information.</li> </ul>	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
<b>Mouth sores (may be severe)</b> <p>You may have round, painful, white or gray sores inside your mouth. They can occur on the tongue, lips, gums, or inside your cheeks. In more severe cases they may make it hard to swallow, eat or to brush your teeth. They usually last 1 to 2 weeks.</p> <p><b>To help prevent mouth sores:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take care of your mouth by gently brushing and flossing regularly.</li> <li>Rinse your mouth often. Do not use mouthwashes with alcohol.</li> <li>Instead, try a homemade mouthwash:</li> <li>Mix 1 teaspoonful of baking soda and 1 teaspoonful of salt in 4 cups (1L) of water.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have mouth sores:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check with your health care team as soon as you notice mouth or lip sores or if it hurts to swallow.</li> <li>Avoid hot, spicy, acidic, hard or crunchy foods. Your doctor may prescribe a mouthwash to relieve mouth sores and prevent infection.</li> </ul> <p>See the <a href="#">Mouth Care</a> pamphlet for more information.</p>	Contact your health care team as soon as possible

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
<b>Less Common Side Effects (10-24 out of 100 people)</b>	
<p><b>Low platelets in the blood (may be severe)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch for bleeding (such as unusual nosebleeds or bleeding from the gums) or bruising easily (this is rare).</li> <li>• Very rarely, severe symptoms can happen. If you notice black coloured stools (poo), red or pink coloured urine (pee), red or brown coloured mucus when you cough, severe headache/confusion or bleeding that will not stop, you need to talk to your health care team or go to the nearest emergency room right away.</li> </ul> <p>See the <a href="#">Low Platelet Count</a> pamphlet for more information.</p> <p><b>Fever, chills, infection</b></p> <p>You have a fever if your temperature taken in your mouth (oral temperature) is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>38.3°C (100.9°F) or higher at any time OR</b></li> <li>• <b>38.0°C (or 100.4°F) or higher for at least one hour.</b></li> </ul> <p>While you are getting treatment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep a digital thermometer at home and take your temperature if you feel hot or unwell (for example, chills).</li> <li>• Avoid taking medications that treat a fever before you take your temperature (for example, Tylenol® (acetaminophen)) as they may hide a fever.</li> <li>• Do not eat or drink anything hot or cold right before taking your temperature.</li> <li>• Wash your hands often to prevent infection.</li> <li>• Check with your doctor before getting any vaccines, surgeries, medical procedures or visiting your dentist.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have a fever, talk to your health care team or go to the closest emergency room.</b></p> <p>See our <a href="#">Neutropenia (Low white blood cell count)</a> pamphlet for more information.</p>	<p>Get emergency medical help right away</p>
<p><b>Rash (in rare cases maybe severe)</b></p> <p>Rash may be severe in some rare cases and cause your skin to blister or peel. If this happens, get emergency medical help right away.</p>	<p>Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe</p>

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
<b>Less Common Side Effects (10-24 out of 100 people)</b>	
<b>To prevent and treat dry skin,</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use skin moisturizer.</li> <li>• Protect your skin from the sun and the cold.</li> <li>• Use sunscreen with UVA and UVB protection and a SPF of at least 30.</li> </ul>	
<b>Diarrhea (may be severe)</b>  May happen days to weeks after you get your treatment.  <b>If you have diarrhea :</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take anti-diarrhea medication if your health care team prescribed it.</li> <li>• Avoid foods or drinks with artificial sweetener (e.g. chewing gum, “diet” drinks), coffee and alcohol.</li> <li>• Eat many small meals and snacks instead of 2 or 3 large meals.</li> <li>• Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of liquids each day. Talk to your health care team if you can’t drink 6-8 cups of liquids each day when you have diarrhea. You may need special liquids with salt and sugar, called Oral Rehydration Therapy.</li> </ul> See the <a href="#">Diarrhea</a> pamphlet for more information.	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
<b>Abnormal liver lab tests</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may have yellowish skin or eyes, unusually dark pee or pain on the right side of your belly. Talk to your health care team if this happens.</li> <li>• Your doctor may monitor your liver regularly with a blood test.</li> </ul>	Contact your health care team as soon as possible

**Other rare, but serious side effects are possible.**

**If you experience ANY of the following, speak to your cancer health care provider or get emergency medical help right away:**

- Tingling, numb, pain or trouble moving your fingers or toes; trouble doing up buttons, writing, or picking up small objects
- Dry eyes, redness, irritation, pain, tearing, sensitivity to light or blurred vision
- Lower back pain, body swelling, passing little or no urine, or recent unusual weight gain
- Irregular heartbeat, chest pain, fainting, swelling in legs/ ankles/ belly, shortness of breath
- Pain, swelling and hardening of the vein in an arm or leg
- Feel confused or have a sudden loss of vision, speech or use of your limb(s)

- Severe rash, itchiness, swollen face, lip or tongue, chest or throat tightness
- Redness, rash, blistering or change in skin colour in areas where you've previously received radiation
- You may have skin rash, blistering, or changes in skin colour
- Sudden, severe pain in belly or stomach area
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes and/or red-brown urine
- Increased cough, breathing problems, or coughing blood

## Who do I contact if I have questions or need help?

My cancer health care provider is: \_\_\_\_\_

During the day I should contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Evenings, weekends and holidays:

### Other Notes:

[illegible]

## August 2022 Updated fever info

For more links on how to manage your symptoms go to [www.cancercareontario.ca/symptoms](https://www.cancercareontario.ca/symptoms).

*The information set out in the medication information sheets, regimen information sheets, and symptom management information (for patients) contained in the Drug Formulary (the "Formulary") is intended to be used by health professionals and patients for informational purposes only. The information is not intended to cover all possible uses, directions, precautions, drug interactions or side effects of a certain drug, nor should it be used to indicate that use of a particular drug is safe, appropriate or effective for a given condition.*

*A patient should always consult a healthcare provider if he/she has any questions regarding the information set out in the Formulary. The information in the Formulary is not intended to act as or replace medical advice and should not be relied upon in any such regard. All uses of the Formulary are subject to clinical judgment and actual prescribing patterns may not follow the information provided in the Formulary.*