Tretinoin (ATRA, Vesanoid®)
("treh-tih-NO-in")

How this drug is given: By mouth

Purpose: Slows the growth of cancer cells in leukemia and other cancers

How to take the drug by mouth

• Take with a meal.

• Swallow this capsule whole; do not crush or chew them. If you have trouble swallowing the capsule, the pharmacist will give you specific instructions.

• If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your regular dosing schedule. Do not double dose.

• Wash hands after taking the medication. Avoid handling crushed or broken capsules.

Storage

• Store this medicine at room temperature, away from heat and moisture. Keep this medicine in its original container, out of the reach of children and pets.

Things that may occur during treatment

• Flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, headache, muscle and/or joint aches are common. If these occur, your doctor may suggest taking acetaminophen (Tylenol®) to help control the symptoms. Please let your doctor or nurse know if acetaminophen (Tylenol®) does not help, since other medication may be prescribed.

• Some patients may have mild nausea. You may be given medicine to help with this.

• Mild constipation may occur after treatment begins. Please increase your fluid intake and increase fiber in your diet by eating fresh fruits and vegetables. A daily stool softener, such as docusate (Colace®) and/or laxatives such as senna (Senakot®) may be helpful. If these do not help within 48 hours, tell your doctor or nurse. Do not use bulk forming laxatives such as Metamucil® without talking with your doctor or nurse.
• Loose stools or diarrhea may occur within a few days after the drug is started. You may take loperamide (Imodium A-D®) to help control diarrhea. You may buy this at most drug stores. It is also important to drink more fluids (water, juice, sports drinks). If these do not help, tell your doctor or nurse.

• Your body may not be able to get rid of extra fluid. This is called edema. You may notice some swelling in your arms or legs.

• Skin changes such as dryness or a rash on your body may occur. Ask your doctor or nurse what lotions or creams you may use.

• Eyes may get itchy and watery and bright light may bother you. Natural tears or saline eye drops may help with these symptoms.

• You may have a fast or unusual heartbeat. If you feel any strange changes in your heartbeat, tell your doctor or nurse right away.

• Some patients may feel very tired, also known as fatigue. You may need to rest or take naps more often. Mild to moderate exercise can also be helpful in maintaining your energy.

• Restlessness, sedation, depression or confusion can occur. You may notice a change in your mood. Notify your doctor or nurse if you experience any of these symptoms after starting the drug.

• In rare instances of leukemia (APL), an increase in your white blood cells may occur causing high fever, respiratory distress, lung infection, and heart changes.

Things that may occur after treatment ends (even months to years later)

• Fertility and Related Precautions
  • It is very important to use birth control if you are having sex, because this drug could hurt an unborn baby.
  • Women should not breast-feed while receiving this drug.
  • If you are concerned about any of this, please talk with your doctor or nurse.

The above information includes some, but not necessarily all, of the possible side effects of this medication. The side effects in this teaching sheet may not be the same ones you experience. Your side effects may be different, depending on how often you receive treatment (your schedule) and how much you receive each time (your dosage). Side effects may also vary if you take other medications. Please talk with your doctor or nurse if you have questions about possible side effects you may experience. This document should not take the place of conversations with members of your health care team.

If you experience any significant change in your health during or after treatment, contact a member of your health care team right away.
Managing your oral chemotherapy schedule at home can be challenging. To help you with this, consider using tools to help you keep track of your schedule and any side effects you may have. You can find these tools online at [www.dana-farber.org/OralChemoDiary](http://www.dana-farber.org/OralChemoDiary).