Asparaginase (Elspar®)
(“as-PAR-uh-jin-aze”)

How this drug is given: By injection, by vein (IV) or by muscle (IM)

Purpose To kill cancer cells in leukemia

Things that may occur during or within hours of treatment

1. Facial flushing (warmth or redness of the face), itching, or a skin rash could occur after taking asparaginase. These symptoms are due to an allergic response and should be reported to your doctor or nurse right away.

2. You may have nausea, vomiting, and/or loss of appetite. Nausea and vomiting may begin one to three hours after the drug is given and may last more than 24 hours. Drugs to help you with this will be given.

3. Fever and headaches may occur. Your nurse or physician may instruct you to take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) if these symptoms occur. Notify your doctor or nurse if your temperature rises above 100.5 degrees and lasts longer than 24 hours.

Things that may occur a few days to weeks later

1. Your liver may be affected by this drug. In such cases, the skin might turn yellow and a yellow coloring may be seen in the whites of your eyes. You may have pain in your right side. You may feel more tired. If you have any of these symptoms, please let your doctor or nurse know right away.

2. Changes in personality, depression, and confusion may occur, but are reversible when the drug is stopped. Report any of these changes to physician right away. These can occur as late as several weeks after therapy is done.

3. Inflammation of the pancreas is rare, but may occur. Let your nurse or physician know if you develop stomach pain and/or vomiting or if increased thirst, urination, and appetite occur.
4. This drug may increase your blood sugar level which may require that you receive insulin. Normal blood sugar levels usually return after treatment is stopped.

5. Some or all of your hair may fall out around 3 to 4 weeks after treatment starts. You may lose hair on your head as well as facial and body hair. You may want to buy a wig before hair loss begins. Hair may grow back during treatment.

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.