



## Cetuximab (Erbitux®)

("se-TUK-see-mab")

---

**How drug is given:** by vein (IV)

**Purpose:** To attack certain cancer cells in colorectal, head and neck cancer, and other cancers.

### Things that may occur during or within hours of treatment

1. An allergic reaction may occur. Tell your cancer care team right away if you have fever, chills, chest pain, trouble breathing, itching, rash, or dizziness. You will be given drugs before you start cetuximab that will try to keep this from happening. You may be asked to take dexamethasone (a steroid) at home before you get cetuximab.
2. Mild to moderate nausea, vomiting, and loss of appetite may occur. You may be given medicine to help with this.

### Things that may occur a few days to weeks later

1. Your blood cell counts may drop. This is known as bone marrow suppression. This may happen 7 to 14 days after the drug is given and then blood counts should return to normal. This includes a decrease in :
  - Red blood cells, which carry oxygen in your body to help give you energy
  - White blood cells, which fight infection in your body
  - Platelets, which help clot the blood to stop bleeding

If you have a **fever of 100.5°F (38°C) or higher**, chills, a cough, or any bleeding problems, call **your cancer care team right away**.

2. Skin changes, such as dryness, itching, rash or darkening, may occur on your body. There may be redness and pain over areas where you had radiation treatment. Sunlight may cause your skin to burn easier. Use a sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher when outside. Avoid tanning booths.
3. Nail changes may occur, such as dark lines or changes in color. Nails may become more brittle. It is possible your nail could fall off. Nails usually return to normal after treatment is finished. Please tell your cancer care team if you notice these changes.
4. Loss of appetite may occur; this may lead to weight loss. Talk to your cancer care team if you have questions.

5. You may feel very tired, also known as fatigue. Over time, fatigue could worsen and you may feel physically weak or exhausted. This can be unrelated to activity. You may need to rest or take naps more often. Mild to moderate exercise can help you maintain energy.
6. 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 can buy this at most drug stores. Be sure to also drink more fluids (water, juice, sports drinks). If these do not help within 24 hours, **call your cancer care team.**
7. 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 (Senokot®) may be helpful. If these do not help within 48 hours, tell your cancer care team. Do not use bulk forming laxatives such as Metamucil® without first talking with your cancer care team.
8. If you develop a new or worsening cough or shortness of breath, tell your cancer care team.
9. Some important minerals called electrolytes are found in your blood and body fluids. They can be affected by this medicine. Your cancer care team will check your blood work periodically to monitor your potassium, magnesium, and sodium levels.
10. You may get a headache. Please talk to your cancer care team about what you can take for this.
11. You may lose some feeling or have tingling or burning in your hands and/or feet. This is called peripheral neuropathy. This may increase with continued treatment. Please tell your cancer care team if you have trouble buttoning your clothes. Peripheral neuropathy should get better over time when the drug is stopped. Be careful handling sharp objects, use handrails to avoid falls, and wear supportive shoes.
12. You may have difficulty sleeping. Please talk to your cancer care team if you cannot sleep.
13. Fertility and Related Precautions:
  - It is very important to use birth control if you are having sex, because this drug may be harmful to an unborn baby.
  - Women should not breastfeed while receiving this drug.
  - If you are concerned about any of this, please talk with your cancer care team.

*The above information includes some, but not necessarily all, of the possible side effects of this medication. The side effects listed 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 are taking other medications. Please speak with your cancer care team 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 cancer care team right away.*

THIS SPACE RESERVED FOR WRITTEN COMMENTS OR NOTES FOR THE PATIENT AND FAMILY: