



## Paclitaxel (Taxol®)

("pac-li-TAKS-el")

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

**Purpose:** Treatment of ovarian cancer, breast cancer, Kaposi's sarcoma, lung cancer, bladder cancer, head and neck cancers, and other cancers

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

1. An allergic reaction may occur. Tell your doctor or nurse **right away** if you have fever, chills, chest pain, trouble breathing, itching, rash, or feel dizzy. You will be given drugs before you start paclitaxel that will try to keep this from happening. You may be asked to take dexamethasone (a steroid) at home before you get paclitaxel.
2. Your blood pressure may drop or your heart rate slow down while you are getting this drug. This usually goes back to normal on its own.
3. If you feel any burning or tingling near your IV, please tell your nurse **right away**. If you develop any swelling or redness after you go home, please call your doctor or nurse.

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

1. 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). Be sure to also drink more fluids (water, juice, sports drinks). If these do not help within 24 hours, **call your doctor or nurse**.
2. Some patients may have mild nausea. You may be given medicine to help with this.
3. 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 doctor or nurse if you have trouble buttoning your clothes. Peripheral neuropathy should get better over time when the drug is stopped.
4. You may feel pain or weakness in your joints or muscles. This may happen about 2 to 3 days after you get paclitaxel. This usually gets better in less than a week. If these bother you, ask your doctor or nurse what type of drugs you may use to help with this pain.

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.
6. Your blood cell counts may drop. This is known as bone marrow suppression. This includes a decrease in your:
  - 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

This may happen 7 to 14 days after the drug is given and then blood counts should return to normal. If you have a **fever of 100.5°F (39°C) or higher**, chills, a cough, or any bleeding problems, tell your doctor or nurse **right away**.

7. You may get mouth sores 7 to 10 days after this drug is given. It is important to keep your mouth clean. A soft-bristle toothbrush should be used for brushing your teeth. You may have a burning feeling and redness inside the mouth or on the lips. Use a **baking soda mouth rinse** 4 or 5 times a day.

**Mouth Rinse Recipe:**  
 Mix: 1 tsp **salt or baking soda** with 8 oz. glass of **water**

Other mouth rinses may be ordered by your doctor. Do not use mouth washes that have alcohol in them because they will dry out the mouth. If you cannot eat or swallow because of this, let your doctor or nurse know. Check with your doctor before having any dental work done.

8. Nail changes can 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 doctor or nurse if you notice these changes.

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

### Fertility:

- It is still very important to use birth control if you are having sex, because this drug could harm an unborn baby.
- Men may become sterile and may want to think about sperm banking prior to chemotherapy.
- For women, your period (menstrual cycle) may not be regular for a while or may stop completely and you may not be able to get pregnant.
- Women should not breastfeed 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 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 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.*

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