

Bexarotene (Targretin)

About This Drug

Bexarotene is used to treat cancer. It is given orally (by mouth).

Possible Side Effects

- Decrease in the number of white blood cells. This may raise your risk of infection.
- Nausea
- Pain in your abdomen
- Infection
- Weakness
- Swelling in your legs, ankles, and/or feet
- Changes in your thyroid function
- Increase in your cholesterol and triglyceride level
- Headache
- Rash
- Dry skin

Note: Each of the side effects above was reported in greater than 10% of patients treated with bexarotene. All possible side effects are not included. Your side effects may be different depending on your cancer diagnosis, condition, or if you are receiving other drugs in combination. Please discuss any concerns or questions with your medical team.

Warnings and Precautions

- Severe increase in your cholesterol and triglyceride level
- Inflammation of your pancreas can be life-threatening.
- Changes in your liver function can cause liver failure and be life-threatening.
- A severe decrease in the number of white blood cells
- Sensitivity to sunlight/light. You may get a skin rash/reaction if you are in the sun or are exposed to sun lamps and tanning beds.
- Cataracts (clouding of the lens in your eye). This drug may make cataracts worse or may raise the chance of new cataracts.

- Blood sugar levels may change

Note: Some of the side effects above are very rare. If you have concerns and/or questions, please discuss them with your medical team.

How to Take Your Medication

- Take the medicine with food.
- **Missed dose:** If you vomit or miss a dose, contact your doctor for further instructions. Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.
- **Handling:** Wash your hands after handling your medicine, your caretakers should not handle your medicine with bare hands and should wear latex gloves.
- This drug may be present in the saliva, tears, sweat, urine, stool, vomit, semen, and vaginal secretions. Talk to your doctor and/or your nurse about the necessary precautions to take during this time.
- **Storage:** Store this medicine in the original container at 36° to 77°F (2° to 25°C), away from light, heat and humidity. Do not take this medicine after the expiration date printed on the container.
- **Disposal of unused medicine:** Do not flush any expired and/or unused medicine down the toilet or drain unless you are specifically instructed to do so on the medication label. Some facilities have take-back programs and/or other options. If you do not have a take-back program in your area, then please discuss with your nurse or your doctor how to dispose of unused medicine.

Treating Side Effects

- To decrease the risk of infection, wash your hands regularly.
- Avoid close contact with people who have a cold, the flu, or other infections.
- Take your temperature as your doctor or nurse tells you, and whenever you feel like you may have a fever.
- Drink plenty of fluids (a minimum of eight glasses per day is recommended).
- To help with nausea and vomiting, eat small, frequent meals instead of three large meals a day. Choose foods and drinks that are at room temperature. Ask your nurse or doctor about other helpful tips and medicine that is available to help stop or lessen these symptoms.
- If you get a rash do not put anything on it unless your doctor or nurse says you may. Keep the area around the rash clean and dry. Ask your doctor for medicine if your rash bothers you.
- Moisturize your skin several times a day.
- Use sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher when you are outdoors even for a short time. Cover up when you are out in the sun. Wear wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved shirts, and pants. Keep your neck, chest, and back covered.
- If you have diabetes, keep good control of your blood sugar level. Tell your nurse or your doctor if your glucose levels are higher or lower than normal.
- Keeping your pain under control is important to your well-being. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you are experiencing pain.



Food and Drug Interactions

- There are no known interactions of bexarotene with food, however this medication should be taken with food.
- To avoid serious toxic effects, do not take more than 15,000 units of vitamin A per day while you are taking bexarotene. Talk to your doctor about all of the vitamins you are taking.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist about all other prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements (vitamins, minerals, herbs, and others) you are taking before starting this medicine as there are known drug interactions with bexarotene. Also, check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new prescription or over-the-counter medicines, or dietary supplements to make sure that there are no interactions.
- This medicine interacts with hormonal birth control (i.e., birth control pills, skin patches, vaginal rings, injections) and affects how they work. Discuss with your doctor and/or nurse what method of birth control may be right for you during your treatment.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your doctor or nurse if you have any of these symptoms and/or any new or unusual symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher
- Chills
- Blurred vision or other changes in eyesight
- Tiredness and/or weakness that interferes with your daily activities
- Headache that does not go away
- Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking and/or is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Pain in your abdomen and/or severe pain in your abdomen that may spread to your back
- Throwing up more than 3 times a day
- Signs of possible liver problems: dark urine, pale bowel movements, pain in your abdomen, feeling very tired and weak, unusual itching, or yellowing of the eyes or skin
- New rash and/or itching or a rash that is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Dry skin that is bothersome
- Develop sensitivity to sunlight/light
- Swelling in your legs, ankles, and/or feet
- Unexplained weight gain
- Weight gain of 5 pounds in one week (fluid retention)
- Abnormal blood sugar
- Signs of infection: fever or chills, cough, trouble breathing, severe pain in your abdomen, difficulty urinating, burning or pain when you pass urine, redness and/or swelling of the skin
- Signs of low blood sugar: feeling sleepy, increased hunger, sweating, shakiness, irritability
- Signs of high blood sugar: unusual thirst, passing urine often, headache, sweating, shakiness, irritability
- If you think you may be pregnant, or may have impregnated your partner



Reproduction Warnings

- **Pregnancy warning:** This drug can have harmful effects on the unborn baby. Women of childbearing potential should use **two** effective methods of birth control, unless abstinence is the chosen method. One of the method of birth control should be non-hormonal, 1 month before treatment, during your cancer treatment and for at least 1 month after stopping treatment. Men with female partners of childbearing potential should use a condom during your cancer treatment and for at least 1 month after stopping treatment. Let your doctor know right away if you think you may be pregnant or may have impregnated your partner.
- Women should start treatment with bexarotene on the 2nd or 3rd day of a normal menstrual period.
- A monthly pregnancy test is required for women of childbearing potential.
- **Breastfeeding warning:** It is not known if this drug passes into breast milk. Women should not breastfeed during treatment because this drug could enter the breast milk and cause harm to a breastfeeding baby.
- **Fertility warning:** Fertility studies have not been done with this drug. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you plan to have children. Ask for information on sperm or egg banking.

Revised June 2023

