

Interferon alfa-2b (Intron A)

About This Medicine

Interferon alfa 2b is used to treat cancer. It is given as an injection under the skin (subcutaneously), intramuscularly (IM), and in the vein (IV).

Possible Side Effects

- Nausea and throwing up (vomiting)
- Decreases appetite (decreased hunger)
- Diarrhea (loose bowel movements)
- Flu-like symptoms: fever, headache, chills, muscle and joint aches, and tiredness
- Feeling dizzy
- Changes in the way food and drinks taste
- Hair loss. Hair loss is often temporary, although with certain medicine, hair loss can sometimes be permanent. Hair loss may happen suddenly or gradually. If you lose hair, you may lose it from your head, face, armpits, pubic area, chest, and/or legs. You may also notice your hair getting thin.
- Rash

Note: 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 medicines in combination. Please discuss any concerns or questions with your medical team.

Warnings and Precautions

- Allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis are rare but may happen in some patients. Signs of allergic reaction to this medicine may be swelling of the face, feeling like your tongue or throat are swelling, trouble breathing, rash, itching, fever, chills, feeling dizzy, and/or feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way. **If this happens, do not take another dose of this medicine. You should get urgent medical treatment.**
- Bone marrow suppression. This is a decrease in the number of white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets. This may raise your risk of infection, make you tired and weak, and raise your risk of bleeding.
- Blurred vision or other changes in eyesight including loss of vision
- Severe depression and other psychiatric disorders such as mood changes, thoughts of hurting yourself or others, and suicide

- Stroke. Symptoms of a stroke such as sudden numbness or weakness of your face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of your body; sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding; sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes; sudden trouble walking, feeling dizzy, loss of balance or coordination; or sudden bad headache with no known cause. **If you have any of these symptoms for 2 minutes, call 911.**
- Changes in your heart function, which can be life-threatening such as abnormal electrocardiogram (EKG/ECG), inflammation (swelling) in the tissue of the heart, risk of heart attack, and congestive heart failure - your heart is not pumping blood as well as it should be, and fluid can build up in your body.
- Changes in your thyroid function
- Blood sugar levels may change
- Increase in your triglycerides, which could cause an inflammation of your pancreas
- Inflammation of the lungs and/or increased blood pressure in the arteries of your lungs, which can be life-threatening. You may have a dry cough or trouble breathing.
- Changes in your liver function, which can cause liver failure and be life-threatening
- Interferon alfa-2b contains albumin, which is derived from human plasma and carries a very rare risk of transmitting infectious diseases.
- Risk of developing an autoimmune disease (disorder that causes inflammation) that in rare cases can be life-threatening, such as rheumatoid arthritis, Raynaud's phenomenon, and other diseases.

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 Medicine

- Talk to your doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist for proper preparation, dosing and administration if you are self-injecting this medicine.
- **Missed dose:** If you miss a dose, contact your doctor right away.
- **Handling:** Wash your hands with soap and water, before, and after handling your medicine, your caretakers should not handle your medicine with bare hands and should wear latex gloves.
- Cytotoxic medicines leave the body through urine and stool, but they can also be present in other body fluids such as blood, vomit, semen, and vaginal fluids. Take precautions to prevent others from coming in contact with your medicine or your body fluids. Follow safety precautions during your treatment and for as long as directed by your health care provider after your treatment. If you take a cytotoxic pill each day, follow these precautions every day.
- **Storage:** Store this medicine in the refrigerator, between 36°F to 46°F (2°C to 8°C). Discuss with your nurse or your doctor how to dispose of unused medicine/needles.

Treating Side Effects

- Manage tiredness by pacing your activities for the day.
- Be sure to include periods of rest between energy-draining activities.
- If you are dizzy, get up slowly after sitting or lying.
- 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.
- To help decrease the risk of bleeding, use a soft toothbrush. Check with your nurse before using dental floss.
- Be very careful when using knives or tools.
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor.
- Drink enough fluids to keep your urine pale yellow.
- If you throw up or have diarrhea, you should drink more fluids so that you do not become dehydrated (lack of water in the body from losing too much fluid).
- 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 have diarrhea, eat low-fiber foods that are high in protein and calories and avoid foods that can irritate your digestive tracts or lead to cramping.
- Ask your nurse or doctor about medicine that can lessen or stop your diarrhea.
- To help with decreased appetite, eat small, frequent meals. Eat foods high in calories and protein, such as meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, tofu, eggs, nuts, milk, yogurt, cheese, ice cream, pudding, and nutritional supplements.
- Consider using sauces and spices to increase taste. Daily exercise, with your doctor's approval, may increase your appetite.
- Taking good care of your mouth may help food taste better and improve your appetite.
- 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.
- To help with hair loss, wash with a mild shampoo and avoid washing your hair every day. Avoid coloring your hair.
- Avoid rubbing your scalp, pat your hair or scalp dry.
- Limit your use of hair spray, electric curlers, blow dryers, and curling irons.
- If you are interested in getting a wig, talk to your nurse and they can help you get in touch with programs in your local area.
- 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.
- While you are getting this medicine, please tell your nurse right away if you get a rash, swelling or bruising or your skin gets red, warm, itchy or painful at the site of your infusion or injection

Food and Medicine Interactions

- There are no known interactions of interferon alfa-2b with food.
- This medicine may interact with other medicines. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the prescription and over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements (vitamins, minerals, herbs, and others) that you are taking at this time. 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.



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
- Tiredness that interferes with your daily activities
- Lose interest in your daily activities that you used to enjoy and feeling this way every day, and/or you feel hopelessness
- Severe mood changes such as depression or unusual thoughts and/or behaviors, thoughts of hurting yourself and/or others
- Blurred vision or other changes in eyesight
- Feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way (palpitations)
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Nervousness
- Easy bleeding or bruising
- Symptoms of a stroke such as sudden numbness or weakness of your face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of your body; sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding; sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes; sudden trouble walking, feeling dizzy, loss of balance or coordination; or sudden bad headache with no known cause. **If you have any of these symptoms for 2 minutes, call 911.**
- Chest pain or symptoms of a heart attack. Most heart attacks involve pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes. The pain may go away and come back, or it can be constant. It can feel like pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain. Sometimes pain is felt in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach. **If any of these symptoms last 2 minutes, call 911.** Dry cough
- Lips or skin turn a bluish color
- Wheezing and/or trouble breathing
- Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking and/or is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Throwing up more than 3 times a day
- Severe pain in your abdomen that may spread to your back
- Lasting loss of appetite or rapid weight loss of five pounds in a week
- Changes in the way food and drink taste that is causing a loss of appetite
- Difficult eating/swallowing and/or sore mouth/throat
- Diarrhea, 4 times in one day or diarrhea with lack of strength or a feeling of being dizzy
- 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
- Signs of allergic reaction: swelling of the face, feeling like your tongue or throat are swelling, trouble breathing, rash, itching, fever, chills, feeling dizzy, and/or feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way. **If this happens, call 911 for emergency care.**
- Flu-like symptoms: fever, headache, chills, muscle and joint aches, and fatigue (low energy, feeling weak)
- Swelling of the legs, feet, or ankles
- Unexplained weight gain or weight gain of 5 pounds in one week (fluid retention)
- Unexplained weight loss



- Abnormal blood sugar
- Unusual thirst, passing urine often, headache, sweating, shakiness, irritability
- Signs of low thyroid function: tiredness, unexplained weight gain, hair loss, dry skin, constipation, increased sensitivity to cold
- Signs of increased thyroid function: unexplained weight loss, sweating, irritability, feeling that your heart is beating fast or in a not normal way (palpitations)
- New rash and/or itching or a rash that is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Any change in a pre-existing autoimmune or inflammatory condition
- If you think you may be pregnant

Reproduction Warnings

- **Pregnancy warning:** It is not known if this medicine may harm an unborn child. For this reason, be sure to talk with your doctor if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant while receiving this medicine. Let your doctor know right away if you think you may be pregnant.
- **Breastfeeding warning:** It is not known if this medicine passes into breast milk. For this reason, women should talk to their doctor about the risks and benefits of breastfeeding during treatment with this medicine because this medicine may enter the breast milk and cause harm to a breastfeeding baby.
- **Fertility warning:** Fertility studies have not been done with this medicine. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you plan to have children. Ask for information on sperm or egg banking.

Revised September 2023

