

## Pemetrexed (Alimta, Pemfexy)

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### About This Drug

Pemetrexed is used to treat cancer. It is given in the vein (IV)

### Possible Side Effects

- 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.
- Soreness of the mouth and throat. You may have red areas, white patches, or sores that hurt.
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up)
- Diarrhea (loose bowel movements)
- Constipation (not able to move bowels)
- Tiredness and/or weakness
- Fever
- Decreased appetite (decreased hunger)
- Cough
- Trouble breathing
- Rash

**Note:** Each of the side effects above was reported in 20% or greater of patients treated with pemetrexed alone and/or in combination with other chemotherapy agents. Your side effects may be different if you are receiving pemetrexed in combination with another drug used to treat cancer. Not all possible side effects are included above.

### Warnings and Precautions

- Severe bone marrow suppression
- Changes in your kidney function, which can be life-threatening.
- Severe allergic skin reaction, which can be life-threatening. You may develop a rash with fluid-filled bumps/blisters, and/or a red skin rash which sometimes can peel off.
- Inflammation (swelling) of the lungs, which can be life-threatening. You may have a dry cough or trouble breathing.

- If you have received radiation treatments, your skin may become red after receiving pemetrexed. This reaction is called “radiation recall.” Your body is recalling, or remembering, that it had radiation therapy.

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

## Important Information

- 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.
- You may be prescribed steroids, folic acid, and vitamin B12 before, during and after your treatment to help decrease some of the side effects. It is important to take these medicines as prescribed by your doctor.

## Treating Side Effects

- Manage tiredness by pacing your activities for the day.
- Be sure to include periods of rest between energy-draining activities.
- 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 plenty of fluids (a minimum of eight glasses per day is recommended).
- 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).
- Mouth care is very important. Your mouth care should consist of routine, gentle cleaning of your teeth or dentures and rinsing your mouth with a mixture of 1/2 teaspoon of salt in 8 ounces of water or 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda in 8 ounces of water. This should be done at least after each meal and at bedtime.
- If you have mouth sores, avoid mouthwash that has alcohol. Also avoid alcohol and smoking because they can bother your mouth and throat.
- 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.
- If you are not able to move your bowels, check with your doctor or nurse before you use enemas, laxatives, or suppositories.



- Ask your doctor or nurse about medicines that are available to help stop or lessen constipation and/or 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.
- 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.
- If you received radiation, and your skin becomes red or irritated again, follow the same care instructions you did during radiation treatment. Be sure to tell the nurse or doctor administering your chemotherapy about your skin changes.

## Food and Drug Interactions

- There are no known interactions of pemetrexed with food.
- 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 pemetrexed. 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.
- There are known interactions of pemetrexed with ibuprofen. You may need to avoid taking ibuprofen for 2 days before, the day of, and 2 days after receiving pemetrexed depending on your kidney function. Ask your doctor what over-the-counter (OTC) medicines you can take for fever, headache and muscle and joint pain.

## 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
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Easy bleeding or bruising
- Pain in your chest
- Dry cough and/or a cough that is bothersome
- Wheezing and/or trouble breathing
- Pain in your mouth or throat that makes it hard to eat or drink
- Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking and/or is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Throwing up more than 3 times a day
- No bowel movement in 3 days or when you feel uncomfortable
- Diarrhea, 4 times in one day or diarrhea with lack of strength or a feeling of being dizzy
- Lasting loss of appetite or rapid weight loss of five pounds in a week



- Decreased or very dark urine
- A new rash or a rash that is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Flu-like symptoms: fever, headache, muscle and joint aches, and fatigue (low energy, feeling weak)
- 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 effective methods of birth control during your cancer treatment and for 6 months after stopping treatment. Males with female partners of childbearing potential should use effective contraception during treatment and for 3 months after stopping treatment. Let your doctor know right away if you think you may be pregnant or may have impregnated your partner.
- **Breastfeeding warning:** It is not known if this drug passes into breast milk. Women should not breastfeed during treatment and for 1 week after stopping treatment because this drug could enter the breast milk and cause harm to a breastfeeding baby.
- **Fertility warning:** In men, this drug may affect your ability to have children in the future. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you plan to have children. Ask for information on sperm banking.

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