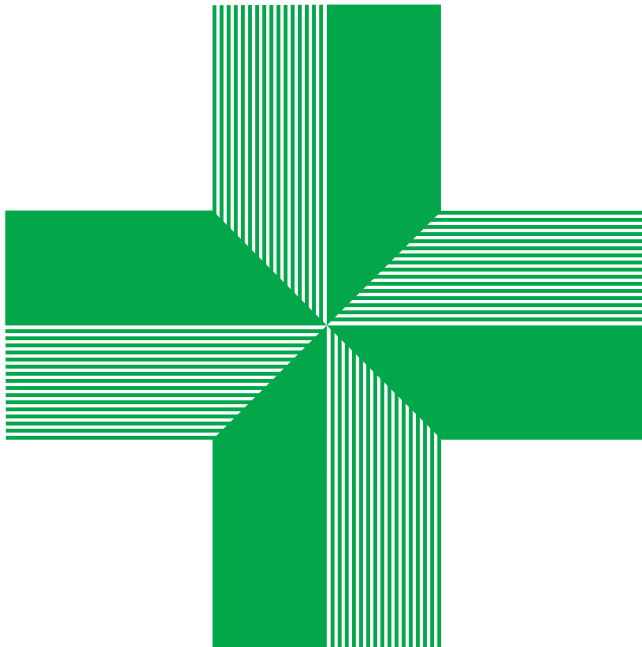


# Controlling sickness after chemotherapy

St Luke's Cancer Centre Pharmacy



Patient information leaflet

This leaflet contains some useful information about your anti-sickness medicines (anti-emetics). If you have any questions after reading this, please ask your nurse, pharmacist or doctor.

The anti-sickness medicines you are given will depend on the chemotherapy you have received. They are carefully chosen so that, if taken as instructed, most patients will not suffer with nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting after chemotherapy. However, if you do, this can usually be dealt with by altering your anti-sickness medicines. So it is important that you tell us if you experience any sickness at all.

Anti-sickness drugs which may be used include: domperidone; metoclopramide; dexamethasone; ondansetron; aprepitant (Emend®); olanzapine.

## How do I take my anti-emetics?

---

**For most chemotherapy:** it is important to take all your anti-sickness medicines (anti-emetics) **regularly** as prescribed, even if you do not feel sick. If you wait until you feel sick, the tablets will not be able to work so well, as your stomach will not be working normally.

**For chemotherapy that does not generally cause much sickness:** you will usually only be given domperidone or metoclopramide, which only needs to be taken if you do start to feel sick, as stated on the label.

All the anti-sickness medicines should be swallowed whole with a drink of water. Dexamethasone should be taken with or after food, as directed on the label.

If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you do not remember until it is almost time for the next dose, do not take the forgotten dose – just continue with normal dosing.

## When do I start taking the tablets?

---

Anti-sickness drugs will have been given to you before you started to receive your chemotherapy, so you do not need to start taking your anti-emetics straightaway.

### **Aprepitant (Emend®)**

The first dose should be taken 20–60 minutes before chemotherapy, and then follow the directions on the label.

### **Ondansetron**

If you have been prescribed **ondansetron**, it should be taken on the evening of chemotherapy.

### **Dexamethasone**

#### ■ **Patients having chemotherapy which includes docetaxel or pemetrexed**

You will start taking your **dexamethasone** the day before your chemotherapy is given, as directed on the label. This is being used to minimise the risk of a reaction to the treatment, but will also work as an anti-sickness drug.

#### ■ **Other patients**

You do not need to start taking any **dexamethasone** until the morning after the chemotherapy was given.

(If you are receiving chemotherapy on 2 or more consecutive days, please ask if you are unclear when to start taking them)

### **Domperidone or Metoclopramide**

You can start taking them any time from when you get home, as directed on the label.

### **Olanzapine**

Follow the instructions on the label. You do not need to take any domperidone or metoclopramide on the same day(s) that you are taking olanzapine.

## What are the common side effects of anti-emetics?

---

- **Constipation** – **ondansetron** can cause constipation. Try to drink plenty of fluids, eat a high fibre diet and do some exercise if possible. You may need a laxative – we suggest docusate or magnesium hydroxide, both available from your local chemist. Let your doctor know at your next visit, if you have this side effect.
- **Indigestion or heartburn** – can be caused by **dexamethasone**. To reduce the symptoms, make sure you always take dexamethasone with or after food. If symptoms persist, let your doctor know at your next visit, as medicines can be prescribed to relieve this symptom.
- **Insomnia (wakefulness)** – **dexamethasone** may interfere with going to sleep. This problem can be reduced by taking your doses early in the day, and definitely before 6pm.

If you still feel very awake at night, do bear in mind that dexamethasone is the best medicine for controlling sickness after chemotherapy.

- **Twitching** – **metoclopramide** can cause muscle twitching or muscle spasms. Contact us or your GP if this is a problem, as you may need your tablets changing to another medicine that suits you better.
- **Headaches** – **ondansetron** can cause headaches. Simple painkillers should resolve this, e.g. paracetamol.
- **Tiredness** – this can be due to the chemotherapy, but **metoclopramide**, **olanzapine** and some other less-commonly used anti-emetics (e.g. **levomepromazine**) can also cause drowsiness (as stated on the label). Allow plenty of time to rest and avoid driving if affected.

If you notice any other side effects which bother you, let your doctor know at your next visit.

## What do I do if my sickness is not controlled?

---

If you feel that your nausea is not well controlled despite taking the full dose of your tablets regularly, let your doctor know at your next visit, and they may adjust your anti-emetics.

If your nausea is severe, and you are unable to eat or drink, contact the 'Oncology Treatment Hotline' (details overleaf) and you will be advised regarding further action to be taken via your GP. You will probably need additions or changes to the anti-emetics you are currently taking. The Fountain Centre within St Luke's, and Macmillan, also provide non-drug ways of helping your symptoms.

If you are sick within 20 minutes of taking any anti-sickness tablets, and you think that they were brought up, you may take a repeat dose if and when you are able.

If you are vomiting and this lasts for 24 hours, or if you have been unable to keep your tablets down for 24 hours, you need to contact the 'Oncology Treatment Hotline' immediately (details overleaf). They will assess you over the telephone, and provide advice for further action. You will probably need an injection to control your symptoms. We may also add to, or change, the anti-emetics you are taking by mouth.

## Reference source

---

St Luke's Cancer Centre "Guidelines for the Use of Anti-emetics with Chemotherapy".

## Useful numbers

---

### Fountain Centre

- Telephone: 01483 406618

### Macmillan Cancer Support

- Telephone: 0808 808 0000
- Website: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)





## Contact details

---

For all concerns about your chemotherapy, please phone:

**Telephone:** 01483 571122

and ask for the Oncology Treatment Hotline, then wait for the operator to put you through to a member of staff.

---

## PALS and Advocacy contact details

---

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

**Telephone:** 01483 402757

**Email:** rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

Past review date: June 2018

Future review date: June 2021

Author: Susan Taylor

**PIN180618–1098**

