

### Warning

This fact sheet aims to let you know the side effects most commonly seen following the administration of your treatment. Please note that when you take any medication, there is a possibility that it causes rare side effects and it is difficult to predict which patients will be affected.

## General Information for Patients Interferon alpha-2b

**Date :** *March 2014*

**Revision:** *November 2016*

Medication	Administration
<b>Induction phase (weeks 1 to 4)</b>	
Interferon	Intravenous infusion over 20 minutes for 5 consecutive days per week, for 4 weeks
<b>Maintenance phase (weeks 5 to 52)</b>	
Interferon	Subcutaneous injection 3 times a week
<i>Total duration of 52 weeks</i>	

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## General Information associated with your treatment

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- › This medication is used to stimulate your immune system against cancer cells. It also prevents the multiplication of abnormal cells.
- › A **blood test** will be done once a week during induction phase, then every month during maintenance phase. Depending on its results and side effects of the previous treatment, the dose of medication might be adjusted or treatment might be delayed.
- › Your **appetite may diminish**. Eat more often, in smaller quantities.
- › **Alcohol** (in small quantities) is permitted unless otherwise advised and will not affect the efficacy of the treatments. It is highly recommended that you drink a lot of liquids that don't contain caffeine or alcohol throughout the year of treatment.
- › You can have an **active sexual** life during your treatments. Your partner will not be exposed to, nor harmed by chemotherapy effects. However, a decrease in your sexual drive may occur during this period. This may also be influenced by different factors (fatigue, stress, etc.)
- › For **male patients**, the sperm count may be affected and negative effects on the embryo may occur. In fact, the production of spermatozooids may be reduced or completely absent during treatments. In certain patients, this reduction of fertility may be permanent, may get better or return to normal after the treatments have stopped. This reduction of **fertility** does not prevent erection or sexual activity. A pregnancy remains possible. If you have sex with a woman of childbearing age it is strongly recommended to use a method of contraception during the treatment.
- › In **pre-menopausal female patients** chemotherapy may cause irregularities or cessation of the **menstrual cycle** during treatment. The menstrual cycle may restart or return to normal after the end of treatment. It may also stop permanently. However, a pregnancy remains possible and chemotherapy administered during pregnancy may harm the embryo. A birth control method is strongly recommended during treatment. Breast-feeding is contraindicated during treatment.
- › Consult your doctor or pharmacist before you take other medications (even over the counter medications available without a prescription) or natural health products. These may provoke an interaction with your treatment and diminish its efficacy or increase side effects.
- › Follow the instructions given by your cancer center about the right way to handle and dispose of biological fluids (for example urine, stools) in order to protect the environment and your relatives.
- › Be sure to always have on hand the complete list of your medications, dietary supplements, vitamins and other natural health products. Give it to your doctor and your pharmacist. It is important to make them aware of any change.

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## Adverse effects and their management

Adverse effects	Management
<u>During induction phase (weeks 1 to 4)</u> Significant <b>nausea and vomiting</b> may occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› You will be prescribed medication to prevent nausea to be taken prior to treatment. At home, you may have to take medications as needed.</li></ul>
<u>During maintenance phase (weeks 5 to 52)</u> <b>Nausea</b> , usually light, may occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› At home, you may have to take medications as needed.</li><li>› Contact a member of your healthcare team if the nausea or vomiting is not relieved by your medication.</li></ul>
Depending on the individual, <b>thinning of the hair</b> may occur. In general, this happens 2 to 3 weeks after the start of the treatment. However, don't worry; your hair will grow back after treatments have ended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Use gentle shampoo.</li><li>› Avoid brushing hair vigorously.</li><li>› Avoid hair spray, dyes and perms.</li></ul>
<b>Flu-like symptoms</b> may occur shortly after your treatment and last 4 to 8 hours. You may experience mild to moderate symptoms, mainly <b>fever</b> but also <b>chills, headache, muscle or bone pain</b> . These symptoms are usually of light or moderate intensity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Atasol®) will be administered before each dose of interferon.</li><li>› <u>On treatment days</u>, if these symptoms persist or are bothering you, acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Atasol®) can be taken every 4 to 6 hours if recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.</li><li>› Drink a lot of water during your treatments.</li><li>› <u>During the maintenance phase</u>, it is recommended to administer interferon at bedtime.</li><li>› If fever <math>\geq 38,3^{\circ}\text{C}</math> and chills persist more than 24 hours after your treatment, you may have an infection. Consult immediately a member of your healthcare team or go to the Emergency Room.</li></ul>

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You may experience <b>fatigue</b> during your treatments. This is usually only temporary and may be related to different reasons (medication, stress, the disease).	› Maintain a good level of activity but rest when you feel the need to.
A decrease in the <b>white blood cells</b> will occur during your treatment. You may be at higher risk of infections during this period.	› Wash your hands often. › During this period, avoid coming into contact with people who have contagious diseases. › Consult immediately a member of your health care team or go immediately to the Emergency Room if you have a fever $\geq 38,3^{\circ}\text{C}$ ( $101^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) that persist more than 24 hours with or without other signs of infection (chills, cough, sore throat, pain while urinating...).
Mild to severe <b>sadness, irritable mood, decreased energy and motivation and dark thoughts</b> are common side effects of this drug.	› Speak to your family and friends. › Eat well, exercise and have good sleep habits. › <b>If it occurs, speak to a member of your health care team.</b>
Rare adverse effects that can be severe or serious to communicate quickly to your doctor	
If you notice <b>visual changes, chest pain or abdominal pain, cough and/or fever persisting more than 24 hours and sudden shortness of breath.</b>	› Communicate immediately with a member of your health care team or go to Emergency Room.
<b>Eye problems</b> like pain, redness, blurred or decreased vision may rarely occur.	› Contact rapidly a member of your healthcare team.

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## Special Considerations

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### During maintenance phase

#### **If you are using a multi-dose pen,**

Keep your pen refrigerated, but do not freeze it. Take it out of the refrigerator about 30 minutes before your injection. Keep it out of the reach of children.

Make sure you understand how to appropriately set the pen to the dose prescribed by your doctor by rotating it until the right number of clicks are heard.

Wash your hands before and after handling the pen.

Interferon must be administered in a part of your body that is covered by a thick layer of fat such as the thighs, abdomen (around the belly button and below the waist) or the external part of the upper arm. Do not use the same injection site more than once every 6 weeks.

You should not use your pen for more than 4 weeks after opening and first use. Moreover, if the cartridge stays at room temperature for more than 48 hours, it should be discarded.

**If you forget a dose**, you may take it as soon as you remember but do not double your next dose. Try, however, to do your injections as regularly as possible at same time every day, preferably at bedtime.

Don't throw away unused medication at home. Bring it back to your pharmacy to be destroyed safely. Throw away used cartridges and needles in a rigid container made for collecting such waste and bring it back to the pharmacy when full.

**Pharmacist :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_ AM to \_\_\_\_\_ PM (Monday to Friday)