Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Cetuximab

This information from Lexicomp® explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it’s used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US

Erbitux

Brand Names: Canada

Erbitux

Warning

- Some people have had severe and sometimes deadly side effects during or several hours after the infusion. Most of the time, this happened with the first dose. The chance of an infusion reaction may be raised if you have had a tick bite or red meat allergy. You may be watched closely during and for some time after the infusion. Tell your doctor if you have any bad effects during or after the infusion.
- Rarely, loss of heart function and sudden death have happened in people who were taking this drug and also getting radiation or other chemo. Tell your doctor if you have ever had heart disease, heart failure (weak heart), or an abnormal heartbeat. If you have questions, talk with your doctor.
- Have blood work checked as you have been told by the doctor. Talk with the doctor.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat cancer of the head and neck.
- It is used to treat colorectal cancer.
- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you are breast-feeding. Do not breast-feed while you take this drug or for 2 months after your last dose.

This drug may interact with other drugs or health problems.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- You may have more chance of getting an infection. Wash hands often. Stay away from people with infections, colds, or flu.
- Avoid sun, sunlamps, and tanning beds. Use sunscreen and wear clothing and eyewear that protects from the sun while taking this drug and for at least 2 months after the last dose.
- It is common for skin reactions to happen with this drug. These reactions

may include acne-like rash, change in skin or fingernails, dry or cracked skin, or skin irritation. Most of the time, an acne-like rash happened within 2 weeks of starting this drug and went away after stopping it. Sometimes, the rash lasted for more than 28 days after stopping this drug. Life-threatening and deadly skin reactions (like Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis) have also happened with this drug. Call your doctor if you have red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin, or if you have a skin reaction that bothers you.

- If you have had or will be having radiation treatment, talk with your doctor. Worse side effects from radiation treatment have happened with this drug. Sometimes this has been deadly.
- This drug may cause fertility problems. This may affect being able to have children. Talk with the doctor.
- This drug may cause harm to an unborn baby. A pregnancy test will be done before you start this drug to show that you are NOT pregnant.
- If you may become pregnant, you must use birth control while taking this drug and for some time after the last dose. Ask your doctor how long to use birth control. If you get pregnant, call your doctor right away.

What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

WARNING/CAUTION: Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Signs of infection like fever, chills, very bad sore throat, ear or sinus pain, cough, more sputum or change in color of sputum, pain with passing urine, mouth sores, or wound that will not heal.

- Signs of fluid and electrolyte problems like mood changes, confusion, muscle pain or weakness, fast or abnormal heartbeat, severe dizziness or passing out, increased thirst, seizures, feeling very tired or weak, decreased appetite, unable to pass urine or change in the amount of urine produced, dry mouth, dry eyes, or severe upset stomach or throwing up.
- Signs of high or low blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- Feeling confused.
- Depression or other mood changes.
- Eye irritation.
- Chest pain or pressure or a fast heartbeat.
- A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.
- Redness or irritation of the palms of hands or soles of feet.
- Some people have had lung problems with this drug. Sometimes, this has been deadly. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of lung problems like shortness of breath or other trouble breathing, cough that is new or worse, or fever.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Hair loss.
- Feeling tired or weak.
- Mouth irritation or mouth sores.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Headache.
- Weight loss.

- Nose or throat irritation.
- Decreased appetite.
- Bone or joint pain.
- Change in taste.
- Constipation, diarrhea, throwing up, and upset stomach are common with this drug. If these happen, talk with your doctor about ways to lower these side effects. Call your doctor right away if any of these effects bother you, do not go away, or get very bad.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

- It is given as an infusion into a vein over a period of time.
- Other drugs may be given to help with infusion side effects.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Call your doctor to find out what to do.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

- If you need to store this drug at home, talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about how to store it.

General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else’s drugs.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. Check with your pharmacist. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

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If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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