PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Vemurafenib

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ 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

Zelboraf

Brand Names: Canada

Zelboraf

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat a type of skin cancer (melanoma).
- It is used to treat a type of blood cell cancer called Erdheim-Chester disease (ECD).
- 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 have any of these health problems: Low calcium levels, low magnesium levels, or low potassium levels.
- If you have a long QT on ECG.
- If you are taking any drugs that can cause a certain type of heartbeat that is not normal (prolonged QT interval). There are many drugs that can do this. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.
- If you take any other drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins). There are many drugs that interact with this drug, like certain drugs that are used for HIV, infections, or seizures.
- If you are breast-feeding. Do not breast-feed while you take this drug and for 2 weeks after your last dose.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

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.
- Have your blood work checked and an ECG (to see how your heart beats) as you have been told by your doctor.
- This drug may add to the chance of getting some types of cancer. Talk with the doctor.
- You will need to have a skin exam before you start this drug and every 2 months while you take it. You will also need to do monthly skin checks as told by your doctor.
- You may get sunburned more easily. Avoid sun, sunlamps, and tanning beds. Use sunscreen and wear clothing and eyewear that protects you from the sun.
- Bright lights may bother you. Wear sunglasses.
- 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.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.
- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if you take

it while you are 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 liver problems like dark urine, tiredness, decreased appetite, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.
- Signs of kidney problems like unable to pass urine, change in how much urine is passed, blood in the urine, or a big weight gain.
- Signs of high blood pressure like very bad headache or

dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.

- Swelling in the arms or legs.
- A skin lump or growth.
- Redness, irritation, pain, or thick skin on the palms of the hands or soles of the feet.
- Change in eyesight, eye pain, or severe eye irritation.
- A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.
- Bending of the fingers inward has happened with this drug. Sometimes, this could be very bad or disabling. Call your doctor right away if this happens to you.
- Have your skin checked. Tell your doctor if you have any skin changes like a new wart, skin sore or reddish bump that bleeds or does not heal, or a change in the color or size of a mole.
- A type of abnormal heartbeat (prolonged QT interval) has happened with this drug. This can be life-threatening and may lead to another type of severe abnormal heartbeat (torsades de pointes). Call your doctor right away if you have a fast or abnormal heartbeat, dizziness, or if you pass out.
- Severe skin reactions may happen with this drug. These include Stevens-Johnson syndrome (SJS), toxic

epidermal necrolysis (TEN), and other serious reactions. Sometimes, body organs may also be affected. These reactions can be deadly. Get medical help right away if you have signs like red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin; red or irritated eyes; sores in your mouth, throat, nose, eyes, genitals, or any areas of skin; fever; chills; body aches; shortness of breath; or swollen glands.

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.
- Back, muscle, or joint pain.
- Itching.
- Headache.
- Change in taste.
- Feeling tired or weak.
- Cough.
- Dry skin.
- Constipation, diarrhea, upset stomach, throwing up, and decreased appetite 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 get better, or are severe.

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.

- Take with or without food.
- Swallow whole. Do not chew or crush.
- Take with a full glass of water.
- Keep taking this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.
- If you throw up after taking a dose, do not repeat the dose. Take your next dose at your normal time.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If the next dose is less than 4 hours away, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

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

- Store tablets in the original container at room temperature. Keep the cap tightly closed.
- Store in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- 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.

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.
- 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.

- This drug comes with an extra patient fact sheet called a Medication Guide. Read it with care. Read it again each time this drug is refilled. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with the doctor, 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.

Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care

provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms.

Last Reviewed Date

2026-10-30

Copyright

© 2026 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

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

Vemurafenib - Last updated on December 12, 2022

All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center