Pembrolizumab

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
Keytruda

Brand Names: Canada
Keytruda

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat cancer.

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 taking any of these drugs: Lenalidomide, pomalidomide, or thalidomide.
- If you are breast-feeding. Do not breast-feed while you take this drug or for 4 months 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?**

**For all uses of this drug:**

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.

- This drug may cause very bad side effects. Sometimes these have been life-threatening or deadly. These may happen in the lungs, bowels, liver, kidney, pituitary gland, thyroid gland, or other parts of the body. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.

- Tell your doctor if you have signs of high blood sugar like confusion, feeling sleepy, more thirst, more hungry, passing urine more often, flushing, fast breathing, or breath that smells like fruit.

- Call your doctor right away if you have signs of liver problems like dark urine, feeling tired, not hungry, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.

- Call your doctor right away if you have signs of kidney problems like not able to pass urine; change in how much urine is passed; bloody, brown, or foamy urine; shortness of breath or cough; or puffy or swollen face, feet, or hands.

- Call your doctor right away if you have signs of thyroid, pituitary, or adrenal gland problems. Some signs may be change in mood or the way you act, change in weight, constipation, deeper voice, dizziness, fainting, feeling cold, feeling very tired, hair loss, headache that lasts or is very bad, or lowered interest in sex.

- Call your doctor right away if you have signs of a brain problem like change in balance, feeling confused, fever, memory problems, muscle weakness, seizures, stiff neck, or very upset stomach or throwing up.

- Infusion reactions have happened with this drug. Sometimes, these could be
very bad or life-threatening. Talk with the doctor.

- A very bad skin reaction (Stevens-Johnson syndrome/toxic epidermal necrolysis) may happen. It can cause very bad health problems that may not go away, and sometimes death. Get medical help right away if you have signs like red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin (with or without fever); red or irritated eyes; or sores in your mouth, throat, nose, or eyes.

- If you have had an organ transplant, talk with your doctor. This drug may raise the chance of organ transplant rejection.

- 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.

- Use birth control to prevent pregnancy during treatment and for some time after your last dose. Talk with your doctor to see how long to use birth control after you stop this drug.

For lymphoma:

- If you are having or have had a stem cell transplant with stem cells from someone else (allogeneic), talk with your doctor. Some problems with these types of stem cell transplants have happened in people who have had this drug. These problems can be very bad and can lead to death.

**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:

For all uses of this drug:

- 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 bowel problems like black, tarry, or bloody stools; fever; mucus in the stools; throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds; or very bad stomach pain, constipation, or diarrhea.

• Signs of electrolyte problems like mood changes, confusion, muscle pain or weakness, a heartbeat that does not feel normal, seizures, not hungry, or very bad upset stomach or throwing up.

• Signs of lung or breathing problems like shortness of breath or other trouble breathing, cough, or fever.

• Chest pain or pressure or a fast heartbeat.

• A heartbeat that does not feel normal.

• Any unexplained bruising or bleeding.

• Change in eyesight, eye pain, or very bad eye irritation.

• Swollen gland.

• Feeling very tired or weak.

• Dizziness or passing out.

• Fever or chills.

• Flushing.

• Sweating a lot.

• A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.

• Not able to move.

• White patches on the skin.

**Bladder cancer treatment:**

• Signs of a urinary tract infection (UTI) like blood in the urine, burning or pain when passing urine, feeling the need to pass urine often or right away, fever, lower stomach pain, or pelvic pain.

**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:

- Feeling tired or weak.
- Back, bone, joint, or muscle pain.
- Not hungry.
- Stomach pain.
- Headache.
- Weight loss.
- Hair loss.
- Change in taste.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Signs of a common cold.
- Flu-like signs.
- 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](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.

• Have blood work checked as you have been told by the doctor. Talk with the doctor.

• If you have high blood sugar (diabetes), talk with your doctor. This drug may raise blood sugar.

• Check your blood sugar as you have been told by your doctor.

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.

• 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
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 information should not be used to decide whether or not to take this medicine or any other medicine. Only the healthcare provider has the knowledge and training to decide which medicines are right for a specific patient. This information does not endorse any medicine as safe, effective, or approved for treating any patient or health condition. This is only a brief summary of general information about this medicine. It does NOT include all information about the possible uses, directions, warnings, precautions, interactions, adverse effects, or risks that may apply to this medicine. This information is not specific medical advice and does not replace information you receive from the healthcare provider. You must talk with the healthcare provider for complete information about the risks and benefits of using this medicine.

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If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.