MEDICINE INFORMATION

# GemOx (gemcitabine and oxaliplatin)

A guide to the two-drug chemotherapy combination, including cold sensitivity, blood tests and what to tell the team between visits.

## At a glance

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| **Treatment** | Gemcitabine + Oxaliplatin |
| **When it may be used** | For some cancers of the bile ducts or gallbladder and in certain other cancer settings. |
| **How it is given** | Gemcitabine and oxaliplatin are both given by drip into a vein. |
| **Before you start** | Tell your team about nerve symptoms, recent infections and any biliary stent or drain. Keep your hospital's 24-hour number handy. |

## What this treatment is and how it works

Gemcitabine interferes with the way dividing cells copy their genetic material. Oxaliplatin is a platinum chemotherapy that damages that material. Used together, they can slow cancer growth. Both can also affect healthy cells, which is why you have blood tests and time to recover between treatments.

## When it may be used

Your cancer team may discuss GemOx for advanced biliary tract cancer, which includes cancers of the bile ducts and gallbladder. It is also used in selected settings for some other cancers. The reason for using it, the schedule and how the team assesses benefit depend on the diagnosis and your previous treatment. A regimen called R-GemOx also contains rituximab. Ask which plan you are being offered and what the team hopes it will achieve.

## Before treatment

Tell the team about any numbness or tingling, kidney or liver problems, recent infection and previous reactions to platinum drugs. If you have a biliary stent or drain, tell the team when it was inserted or last changed. Ask whom to call if you develop pain, fever or new yellowing of the eyes or skin.

The team usually checks your blood counts and how well your kidneys and liver work. Bring a list of medicines and supplements. Ask what you should take for nausea, what to bring to the day unit and whether you need someone to take you home.

## How treatment is given

You have both medicines as infusions, which are drips into a vein. The nurse may use a small tube in the hand or arm or an existing line or port. The visits and rest days together make up a cycle. Some plans give both medicines at the same visit and others use separate visits. Use the calendar from your hospital.

Tell staff straight away if you feel itchy, flushed, dizzy, shivery or short of breath, or if the drip area stings or swells. Oxaliplatin can briefly make the throat feel tight, especially after cold air or drinks. Because an allergic reaction can also affect breathing, let staff assess throat or breathing symptoms promptly.

## Tests and monitoring during treatment

Blood counts and kidney and liver tests help the team decide when the next cycle can go ahead. Tell them how long any tingling lasts and whether you have trouble walking, writing or holding small objects. Nerve symptoms can build up over several cycles. The team may change the plan to limit lasting damage. Ask when they will review symptoms and scans to check how the cancer is responding.

## Side effects

### Common side effects

- **Cold sensitivity and nerve symptoms.** Cold drinks, cold air or touching something from the fridge may trigger tingling, jaw discomfort or unusual throat sensations. Use room-temperature drinks and gloves for cold objects while symptoms persist, following your team's advice.
- **Low blood counts.** You may be more likely to get an infection, feel tired or bruise. Report fever, unusual bleeding or new breathlessness.
- **Nausea, bowel changes and mouth soreness.** Follow your prescribed anti-sickness plan and tell the team if you cannot drink normally or have ongoing diarrhoea or mouth ulcers.
- **Tiredness or flu-like aches.** Gemcitabine can cause aches and fever. Call the cancer unit for fever or shaking chills so they can assess for infection.

### Less common and rare effects

An allergic reaction can occur even if you have had earlier infusions without a problem. New breathlessness or cough can also have other causes, including infection or, less commonly, lung inflammation. Rarely, gemcitabine can cause a serious kidney and blood problem. Report very little urine, swelling or new bruising promptly.

## When to seek urgent help

Call your hospital's 24-hour cancer care number straight away for fever, shaking chills, sudden illness, worsening diarrhoea or vomiting, difficulty drinking or new yellowing of the eyes or skin. Follow your hospital's temperature instructions. If you have no written threshold, call at 37.5°C (99.5°F) or above, or below 36°C (96.8°F). Call if you feel very unwell even with a normal temperature.

Seek emergency care for severe breathing trouble, chest pain, swelling of the face or throat, collapse, severe tummy pain or bleeding that will not stop. Tell staff you are receiving gemcitabine and oxaliplatin and give your last treatment date if you know it.

## Practical advice for this treatment

### Prepare for cold sensitivity

Oxaliplatin may cause unusual sensations in your fingers, mouth or throat during or soon after treatment. Cold drinks, cool air or touching cold objects may trigger them. Ask the team how long to avoid these triggers. Tell the nurse about throat tightness or breathing difficulty immediately, since the team needs to check for an infusion reaction.

### Watch for nerve symptoms that last

Tell the team if numbness carries into the next cycle or makes it hard to do buttons, hold objects or walk. The pattern and effect on daily tasks matter when assessing whether oxaliplatin should continue at the same dose.

### Know which symptoms need examination

Gemcitabine can affect blood counts and sometimes cause fever or flu-like symptoms. Follow your unit's fever advice because infection can look similar. With new cough, increasing breathlessness or very reduced urine, contact the hospital promptly.

## Medicines, interactions and vaccinations

Check new prescriptions, pharmacy medicines, supplements and vaccines with your cancer team. Ask which medicines you can use for pain, diarrhoea or nausea. Ask before receiving a live vaccine, including after your course finishes.

## Everyday life

Plan a few room-temperature drinks and snacks for the days after oxaliplatin. Use gloves for chilled items and take care on stairs if your feet feel numb. Tell the team if fatigue, food intake or nerve symptoms are making daily tasks difficult. Your caregiver can help track symptoms and call with you.

## Pregnancy, fertility and breastfeeding

Ask about fertility preservation before starting if it matters to you. Ask your team how to avoid pregnancy during treatment and for how long after the last treatment, and when breastfeeding can safely resume.

## After treatment

Some nerve symptoms take time to improve and can occasionally worsen for a while after the last oxaliplatin dose. Tell your team about symptoms that persist or affect daily activities. Ask when your next scan or appointment is and whom to call before then.

## Frequently asked questions

### Is GemOx the same as R-GemOx?

R-GemOx adds rituximab in some lymphoma plans. If you receive it, ask about hepatitis B screening and the extra infusion precautions.

### Will I get both medicines every time?

This depends on your schedule and blood results. Ask for a calendar showing what you are due to receive.

### Why do cold drinks feel uncomfortable?

Oxaliplatin can make nerves temporarily sensitive to cold. Try drinks at room temperature and report swallowing or breathing changes promptly.

### How long should I avoid very cold things?

Follow the advice from your unit and avoid triggers while you are having symptoms. Tell the team if cold sensitivity continues into the next cycle.

### Is numbness between visits important?

Yes. Explain when it starts, how long it lasts and whether it affects everyday tasks so your team can assess it.

### What if I have fever after gemcitabine?

Call the hospital’s 24-hour number. Gemcitabine can cause fever, and an infection needs to be assessed promptly.

### Does a biliary stent change whom I should call?

Use your cancer unit’s 24-hour number for fever, shaking chills or new yellowing of the skin or eyes. Tell the team you have a bile duct stent or drain. It can advise whether you need the emergency department or the team that looks after the stent.

### Why might a visit be delayed?

The team may wait for blood counts to recover, check an abnormal test or assess a new symptom. Ask when to repeat the blood test.

### Can I take something for nausea before I feel sick?

Take the anti-sickness medicines on the schedule your team gave you. Ask who to call if they are not helping.

### Is redness at the drip site important?

Tell the nurse straight away. If it starts at home, call your treatment unit and describe the redness, swelling or pain.

### What if I cannot make a treatment visit?

Call the unit promptly so it can advise you and reschedule any tests or infusions.

### Can I work between cycles?

Some people do. Plan around appointments and how you feel, and ask for advice if work exposes you to infection, cold or injury.

### Can tingling continue after treatment?

It can. Report lasting or worsening symptoms, particularly if they interfere with walking, writing or sleep.

## Individual medicine guides

- Gemcitabine
- Oxaliplatin

### Sources and further reading

Read this guide alongside your hospital's plan. Ask your pharmacist to confirm the exact product dispensed in India and follow the instructions for that product.

### Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) and prescribing information

- Gemcitabine infusion - UK SmPC
- Oxaliplatin infusion - UK SmPC
- Gemcitabine - UK product information

### Clinical protocols and other references

- Phase 2 study of GemOx in advanced biliary tract carcinoma
- ESMO biliary tract cancer clinical practice guideline

### Additional sources

- Primary study of GemOx in advanced biliary tract cancer
- Ontario Health, GemOx in lymphoma
- Ontario Health, gemcitabine patient information

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