MEDICINE INFORMATION

Irinotecan and temozolomide

A guide to irinotecan and temozolomide, including taking capsules at home and what to do about diarrhoea.

At a glance

Treatment	Irinotecan + Temozolomide
When it may be used	This combination has been used after earlier treatment for selected people with Ewing sarcoma and other specialist indications.
How it is given	Irinotecan is given by drip into a vein. You take temozolomide capsules by mouth.
Before you start	Tell the team about diarrhoea or other bowel problems, liver problems and medicines or supplements.

What this treatment is and how it works

The two medicines damage the genetic material cells need to multiply. The regimen uses conventional irinotecan, which has different instructions from liposomal irinotecan.

When it may be used

Ask why it has been chosen for your diagnosis.

Before treatment

Get a written diarrhoea plan and home capsule instructions before treatment.

How treatment is given

This regimen uses irinotecan through a vein and temozolomide capsules. The calendar sets out which days to take the capsules. Follow the food and anti-sickness instructions given by the pharmacy.

Tests and monitoring during treatment

The team checks blood counts and liver function. They may ask you to record stools, vomiting, fluid intake and which doses you were able to take.

Side effects

Common or more frequent side effects

- **Changes in blood counts.** Treatment can lower the white cells that fight infection, the red cells that carry oxygen and the platelets that stop bleeding. You may feel tired or get breathless sooner than usual. Let the unit know about nosebleeds, new bruises or small red or purple spots. Fever or shaking chills needs a call to the urgent number even if your next blood test is already booked.
- **Bowel symptoms during and after treatment.** Loose stools during or soon after an infusion can occur together with sweating or cramping. Alert staff when it happens. A separate episode of diarrhoea can begin later. Ask for written advice before leaving about what to take, when to call and what to do if you cannot drink. Give the team the date of the infusion when you ring.
- **Nausea and vomiting.** Check when to take prescribed anti-sickness medicines and which one to use if nausea begins between visits. Taking small, frequent sips may be easier than drinking a whole glass. Call if vomiting keeps returning or stops you from keeping fluids or essential medicines down.

Other reported side effects

Irinotecan can cause cramps, sweating or diarrhoea during or soon after a drip. Tell the nurse straight away. Diarrhoea can also start later at home and needs a separate plan.

Serious effects to recognise

- **Diarrhoea with dehydration or fever.** Contact the unit promptly for repeated watery stools, blood in stools, fever, severe belly pain or increasing dizziness. Follow the treatment-specific diarrhoea instructions. Tell the team if you cannot drink, are passing much less urine or have taken medicine for the symptoms already.

When to seek urgent help

Call your hospital’s 24-hour cancer care number straight away for fever, chills, ongoing or severe diarrhoea, blood in stool, reduced urine or vomiting that prevents drinking. Follow your hospital’s written 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 when your temperature is normal.

Seek emergency care for severe breathing difficulty, swelling of the face or throat, chest pain, collapse or bleeding that will not stop.

Practical advice for this treatment

Learn the two patterns of diarrhoea

Some people develop cramping, sweating, a runny nose or loose stools during or soon after conventional irinotecan. Tell the nurse immediately. The team can give medicine for this early reaction. Diarrhoea can also start later at home. Ask for clear instructions about which medicines to take and when to call. Contact the unit urgently if you have fever, repeated diarrhoea, severe pain or difficulty drinking.

Check the capsule schedule

Temozolomide is taken by mouth in many schedules. Follow the times and food instructions you have been given. Check what to do if you vomit the dose or miss one. Ask about safe handling and keep it in its container and away from children.

Discuss the blood tests and genetic testing

The team monitors white cells, platelets and other blood results. Some people carry versions of the UGT1A1 gene that change how they process irinotecan and raise the risk of serious low white cell counts. Ask your team whether testing is useful for your plan. Results are considered alongside your dose, liver tests and any past side effects.

Medicines, interactions and vaccinations

Check medicines and supplements with your pharmacist. Ask which anti-diarrhoea product to use and when to call. Follow the pharmacy's instructions for handling capsules.

Everyday life

Keep your diarrhoea plan and hospital number to hand. Make a note of the first loose stool and of any medicine you use.

Pregnancy, fertility and breastfeeding

Ask about contraception, fertility and breastfeeding before starting. Get advice based on your last dose of each medicine.

After treatment

Ask which scans and symptoms will be reviewed. Contact the team about continuing bowel problems or tiredness after the last cycle.

Frequently asked questions

What if cramps start during the drip?

Tell the nurse immediately, especially if the cramps come with sweating, a runny nose or sudden diarrhoea. Irinotecan can cause these symptoms during or soon after the drip. The team can assess you and give medicine if needed.

What if diarrhoea begins several days later?

Use the instructions the unit gave you for diarrhoea that starts at home. Call the treatment number if it continues or becomes frequent, you cannot drink, or you have fever, blood in the stool, dizziness or much less urine.

What if I vomit after a capsule?

Call for advice before taking another one.

Can I open the capsules?

Ask your pharmacist if swallowing is difficult. Follow their handling instructions.

Does delayed diarrhoea always mean an infection?

It can be a side effect, and infection can also occur. The team can assess both.

What if I feel too sick to drink?

Call the hospital promptly, particularly if you pass much less urine.

Individual medicine guides

- Irinotecan
- Temozolomide

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

- Conventional irinotecan infusion - UK SmPC
- Temozolomide (Temodal) capsules - UK SmPC
- UK prescribing information for conventional irinotecan
- EMA Temodal product information

Additional sources

- NCI Ewing sarcoma treatment evidence

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