

What is Irinotecan?

Irinotecan is an anti-cancer agent used in the treatment of some solid tumours.

How does it work?

Irinotecan works by binding and preventing the function of an enzyme called topoisomerase I. By blocking this enzyme, it results in breaks in the DNA stands leading to the death of the cell. Before irinotecan can work, it needs to be metabolized by the liver (pro-drug).

How is it given?

Irinotecan is given as an intravenous (IV) infusion. Irinotecan can also be given by mouth as a liquid.

Special instructions:

- Tell your doctor or nurse right away if you have diarrhoea while on, or after receiving irinotecan. You may be prescribed a medication, called loperamide, to help control the diarrhoea.
- You may also be prescribed an antibiotic, to be taken by mouth, to prevent diarrhoea if you had previous trouble with irinotecan.
- If you have severe diarrhoea, you may require IV fluids as an inpatient.
- This medicine may make your mouth sore and irritated. A doctor or nurse may give you oral rinses to keep your mouth clean after you receive irinotecan.
- Irinotecan by mouth should ideally be taken in the morning on an empty stomach.
- Irinotecan oral liquid can be added to a small amount of juice (approx. 30mL) to disguise the taste. The irinotecan liquid can be mixed with cranberry juice, grape juice or flavoured syrup right before it is to be taken.
- If you are receiving oral irinotecan, the pharmacy will place each dose in an individual oral syringe (each syringe is one dose).

Safe Handling:

All chemotherapy taken by mouth can pose a health hazard to caregivers and patients. Take care when handling this medicine and try to prevent the medication from touching your skin. Taking precautions will protect both the patient and the caregiver.

- We suggest that the caregiver wears gloves while handling this medicine. If your skin comes into contact with the medicine, wash your hands or the area of contact right away.
- Prepare a clean area where the drug can be handled safely (away from areas where food is prepared, out of reach of children and away from any fans or air vents). Clean up spills in the area where the medicine is prepared.
- For oral liquids, each syringe is to be used once. Discard each syringe after use. Do not wash and reuse the syringes.

Possible Side Effects:

Listed below, but not limited to, are the more commonly experienced side effects that you may see. The side effects your child might experience may be temporary and some may be permanent.

	Likely Happens to 21-100 children out of every 100	Less Likely Happens to 5-20 children out of every 100	Rare but serious Happens to <5 children out of every 100
Immediate Within 1-2 days of receiving the medicine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nausea and/or vomiting ▪ Loss of appetite ▪ Fever ▪ A feeling of weakness and tiredness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Constipation ▪ Headache 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Severe allergic reaction which can be life threatening with shortness of breaths, low blood pressure, and a rapid heart rate

Irinotecan

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Patient/Caregiver Information

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Immediate Within 1-2 days of receiving the medicine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diarrhoea that can occur during the infusion of irinotecan or immediately after and may be associated with abdominal cramping, a runny nose, tearing, salivation, sweating, flushing (feeling of warmth and red cheeks), and difficulty adjusting your eyes to light 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diarrhoea that may occur later than from 1 day to 2 weeks after irinotecan which could cause excessive loss of water and salts from the body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sever loss of water from the body (dehydration) which if untreated may cause low blood pressure and severe loss of salts, such as sodium and potassium, from the body and could lead to kidney failure which could be life threatening Confusion or sleepiness A slow heart rate Shortness of breath with a cough Pain at the injection site
Prompt Within 2-3 weeks, prior to the next course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer white blood cells in the blood which can make it easier to get infections Hair loss An increase in the blood of a type of white blood cell called eosinophils. These are sometimes associated with allergic reactions Elevation in the blood of certain enzymes or bilirubin found in the liver which could indicate liver irritation or damage. Inflammation and/or sores in the mouth, throat and/or oesophagus Infections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer red blood cells and platelets in the blood. Fewer red blood cells can make you feel tired and weak. A low number of platelets may cause you to bruise and bleed more easily. Rash Reflux or upset stomach (heart burn) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inflammation of gut which can lead to infections, blood in the stools and abdominal pain Kidney failure due to dehydration Blood clots which may be life-threatening A stoppage or blockage of the intestine which may require treatment
Delayed Anytime later during therapy, excluding the above conditions			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inflammation of the lungs which could lead to chest pain and shortness of breath and which may be life threatening.

Irinotecan may increase the side effects of radiation when they are given at the same time during radiation treatment and later (long term).

This information sheet is a brief overview. Each individual can respond differently to the medication, it is vital that you communicate all signs and symptoms you observe to your doctor or nurse.

If you have any questions about the information provided please discuss them with your oncologist or haematologist.

Further information can be obtained from your doctor, nurse or pharmacist or at the following website:
<http://medsafe.govt.nz/consumers/medicine/where.asp>