

## Dacarbazine

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### What is Dacarbazine (da-KAR-ba-zeen) and how does it work?

Dacarbazine is a chemotherapy drug known as an “alkylating agent.” Dacarbazine works to stop fast growing cancer cells from dividing and making new cells.

### What should I tell my doctor before my treatment?

Talk to your doctor about the following:

- If you have ever had treatment for your cancer and the names of the drugs you received.
- If you are pregnant or think you may become pregnant.
- If you are breastfeeding.
- If you have been told that you need to start a new medicine.
- The medicines/pills you are taking including:
  - ▶ Medicines prescribed by any of your doctors
  - ▶ Herbs
  - ▶ Vitamins
  - ▶ Over-the-counter medicines
- If you have ever had heart, liver, or kidney problems.

### How does my doctor decide my chemotherapy dose?

To determine your treatment dose, your doctor will review the following: your height, your weight, your medicines, how well your heart liver and kidneys are working, and any health problems you have. You will have blood drawn before each dose of Dacarbazine to check your kidneys, liver and blood cell count.

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**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

The dose you receive is based on your height and weight and may be adjusted if you have had side effects from any other medicines used to treat your cancer.

You will receive a dose every three weeks. You will see the doctor or nurse practitioner throughout your treatment.

## **How will my treatment be given?**

One hour before your chemotherapy, you will be given several medicines to prevent nausea or vomiting.

Dacarbazine is given directly into your blood stream through a tube (IV) placed in your arm or chest. Dacarbazine comes in a bag with tubing attached. The nurse will connect the tubing to a pump. The treatment takes 45 minutes.

Your entire visit, including your doctor's appointment and your treatment will take about 6 hours.

## **What are the side effects of this treatment?**

Every person responds differently to treatment. Some of the more common side effects of this chemotherapy are:

- Local pain, burning feeling and irritation (sore, tender and itchy) at the needle site while your treatment is being given
- Low white blood cell count (may increase your risk for infection)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Poor appetite
- Increase in enzymes made by your liver (your doctor will check your blood to monitor how your liver is working)
- Flu-like symptoms (chills, fever, aches)
- Numbness or tingling in the hands or feet
- Sensitivity to the sun

## When should I call my doctor?

You should call your doctor right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or higher
- Chills
- Nausea that prevents you from eating or drinking, even after you have taken your anti-nausea medicine
- Vomiting more than 4 to 5 times in a 24 hour period
- Extreme fatigue (feel more tired than usual with or without activity)
- Blood in your urine or stools or dark, tarry, sticky stools
- Pain, redness, or swelling at the place where your chemotherapy was given

## Is there anything else I should know about this treatment?

- Chemotherapy may make it harder for your body to fight infections. Wash your hands often and avoid people who are sick.
- Chemotherapy can change how your body reacts to vaccines. Talk to your doctor before getting any vaccines.
- Avoid sun exposure. Wear SPF 30 (or higher) sunblock and protective clothing.
- Patients who get treatment with these drugs have a slightly higher risk of getting a rare form of blood cancer, called “leukemia”. Your doctor can tell you more about this risk.
- **Do not** get pregnant while taking Dacarbazine. Talk with your doctor about what birth control to use.
- You should drink 8 to 10 eight ounce glasses of non-caffeinated fluid each day throughout your treatment. It is important to stay hydrated while you are receiving chemotherapy.

For more information about cancer, chemotherapy, side effects or how to care for yourself during treatment, refer to your **Chemotherapy and You** book, or ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

You may also find it helpful to watch The James Patient Education videos at <http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos> to help you learn tips for managing treatment side effects.