Paclitaxel and Trastuzumab

What is Paclitaxel (pak-li-TAX-el) and how does it work?
Paclitaxel is a chemotherapy drug known as an “anti-microtubule inhibitor”. Another name for this drug is Taxol™. It is a natural medicine that comes from the bark of Pacific Yew trees. This drug fights cancer by stopping fast growing cancer cells from dividing and making new cancer cells.

What is Trastuzumab (tras-TOO-zoo-mab) and how does it work?
Trastuzumab is a type of targeted cancer therapy called a “monoclonal antibody”. Another name for this drug is Herceptin™. Trastuzumab seeks out cancer cells and attaches to the HER2 receptors, to prevent the cells from dividing and making new cancer cells.

Why am I getting two chemotherapy drugs for my cancer?
Both drugs work to stop fast growing cancer cells from dividing and making new cells, but they attack the cancer cells differently. Giving the two drugs together makes the treatment more effective.

What should I tell my doctor before getting chemotherapy?
- If you have ever had chemotherapy and the names of the chemotherapy drugs you were given.
- If you have ever had heart, liver or lung problems.
- If you are allergic to Cremophor® EL.

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

• If you are allergic to mice.
• If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant. Your doctor will talk to you about birth control while getting chemotherapy.
• 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

How does my doctor decide my chemotherapy dose?
To determine your treatment dose, your doctor will review the following: your stage of cancer, your height, your weight, your medicines, how well your heart and liver are working, and any other health problems you have.

This treatment is given on one day every week. You will see the doctor or nurse practitioner once per month when you are getting this treatment.

Should I eat or drink before my treatment?
It is best to eat a small meal before getting your treatment. Drinking plenty of non-caffeinated fluids may also be helpful. However, if you have been told to limit fluids, check with your doctor about how much you can drink.

How will my treatment be given?
**Paclitaxel** is given directly into your blood stream through a tube (IV) placed in your arm or chest. Paclitaxel comes in a bag with tubing attached. The nurse then connects this to a pump. This treatment takes between 1 and 3 hours depending on the dose. You will be given several medicines, 30 to 60 minutes before your treatment, to prevent you from having an allergic reaction. **These medicines may affect your abilities, so for your safety you should have someone drive you home.**
Trastuzumab is given directly into your blood stream through a tube (IV) placed in your arm or chest. Trastuzumab comes in a bag with tubing attached. The nurse then connects this to a pump. Your first treatment will take 90 minutes. If you do not have any problems with your first treatment, then your future treatments will last 30 minutes.

Your entire visit, including your doctor's appointment and your treatment will take 3 to 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:

- Numbness, tingling and pain in hands and feet
- Fatigue or weakness
- Hair loss, including the hair on the head and body (this normally begins 10 to 14 days after receiving Paclitaxel)
- Mouth pain or open sores in the mouth
- Low white blood cell count (may increase your risk for infection)
- Low platelet count (may cause you to bleed more easily or longer than normal and have more bruising)
- Muscle or joint aches and pain
- Allergic reaction to the chemotherapy treatment including: difficulty breathing, hives, or swelling of the face
- Changes in your nails
- Flu-like symptoms: chills, fever, headache, body aches, and sweating (more common with your first few doses of Trastuzumab)
- Mild nausea
- Diarrhea
- Cough
- Rash
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

A fever can be life threatening if not treated. Your doctor may ask you to go to the hospital.

- Chills, sore throat, cough or a wound that does not get better
- Numbness, tingling or pain that prevents you from doing simple tasks such as walking, buttoning your shirt or holding a cup
- Open sores in your mouth
- Nausea that prevents you from eating or drinking
- Any vomiting, even if you only vomit once
- Skin redness or blisters where the Paclitaxel was given
- Bleeding or bruising, including bloody or black stools or blood in your urine
- Diarrhea (4 or more loose stools in 24 hours)
- Changes in your heartbeat
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Pain in your chest
- Swelling in feet or ankles
- Fast weight gain

Is there anything else I should know about this treatment?

- Some patients may have an allergic reaction while this treatment is being given. To prevent this, you will be given a medicine before your treatment. If an allergic reaction happens during your treatment, the nurse will give you medicine to help manage the reaction and extra precautions will be taken when your next treatment is given.

- **Trastuzumab** may cause problems with the pumping of your heart. Your doctor will check your heart before you start this medicine and every several months while you are getting treatment.
- **Paclitaxel** may make it harder for your body to fight infections. Wash your hands often and avoid people who are sick.

- **Paclitaxel** requires special precautions to prevent the chemotherapy drugs from coming into contact (through blood, urine, bowel movements, vomit and vaginal or seminal fluids) with others. Your chemotherapy nurse will give you guidelines to follow for 48 hours after receiving chemotherapy.

- **Paclitaxel** can change how your body reacts to vaccines. Talk to your doctor before getting any vaccines.

- You should drink 8 to 10 eight-ounce glasses of non-caffeinated fluid each day throughout your treatment. This is important to keep you hydrated while you are receiving chemotherapy.

- Do not get pregnant or breastfeed while receiving this chemotherapy or for 6 months after your last treatment. Tell your doctor right away if you become pregnant.

- **Paclitaxel** may cause women to stop having menstrual cycles. Depending on your age, your menstrual cycles may or may not return.

- It may be difficult to get pregnant even after the chemotherapy is finished.

- This treatment may affect your ability to have children. Talk to your doctor before getting chemotherapy if you are planning to have children in the future.

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](http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos) to help you learn tips for managing treatment side effects.