

# Trastuzumab

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## 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 medicine is Herceptin. Trastuzumab seeks out cancer cells and attaches to the HER2 receptors, to prevent the cells from dividing and making new cancer cells.

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

Talk to your doctor about the following:

- If you have ever had chemotherapy or anti-cancer treatment and the names of the medicines you were given.
- If you have ever had heart or lung problems.
- If you are allergic to mice.
- If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant. Your doctor will talk with you about birth control when you take this medicine.
- 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 ordered by any of your doctors
  - ▶ Herbs
  - ▶ Vitamins
  - ▶ Over-the-counter medicines

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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.**

## **How does my doctor decide my treatment dose?**

To determine your treatment dose, your doctor will review the following: your stage of cancer, your weight, how well your heart works and any other health problems you have.

You will receive a dose every week or every 3 weeks. This treatment may be given along with other chemotherapy or cancer medicines. You will see your doctor or nurse practitioner about once every 4 to 6 weeks during your treatment.

## **Should I eat or drink before my treatment?**

It is best to eat a small meal and drink plenty of fluids before your treatment begins. If you have been told to limit fluids, check with your doctor about how much you can drink.

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

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. Your nurse will connect the tubing to a pump. Your first treatment takes 90 minutes. If you do not have any problems with your first treatment, then your future treatments will take only 30 minutes.

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

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

- Flu-like symptoms: chills, fever, headache, body aches and sweating (more common with your first few doses of Trastuzumab)
- Allergic reaction to Trastuzumab (difficulty breathing, hives, or swelling of your face)
- Mild nausea
- Weakness
- Diarrhea
- Cough
- Rash
- Muscle or joint aches and pain

## 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.**

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Pain in your chest
- Chills, sore throat, cough or a wound that does not get better
- Swelling in your feet or ankles
- Fast weight gain
- Nausea that prevents you from eating or drinking
- Any vomiting, even if you only vomit once
- Diarrhea (4 or more loose stools in 24 hours)
- Changes in your heartbeat

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

- 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 during treatment.
- **Do not get pregnant or breastfeed** while taking this medicine or for 6 months after your last treatment. Tell your doctor right away if you become pregnant.
- Some patients may have an allergic reaction while the Trastuzumab is being given. If an allergic reaction does happen, your nurse will give you medicine to help manage the reaction and take extra precautions during your next treatment.

For more information about cancer, cancer treatments, side effects or how to care for yourself during treatment, 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.