

Capecitabine (Xeloda®) for pancreatic cancer

This fact sheet is for people with pancreatic cancer who want to know more about the chemotherapy drug capecitabine.

Capecitabine is normally given with another chemotherapy drug called gemcitabine - this is known as **GemCap**.

Each hospital may do things slightly differently, and treatment will vary depending on your cancer. Speak to your doctor or nurse about your treatment.

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You can speak to our specialist nurses on our Support Line about any questions you have about chemotherapy. You can call them free on **0808 801 0707**, or email **nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk**



Read more about the other chemotherapy drugs used for pancreatic cancer at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemotherapydrugs**

Read more about chemotherapy in our fact sheet **Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer**, or on our website at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemotherapy**

How is capecitabine used?

Capecitabine is normally given with another chemotherapy drug called gemcitabine – this is known as **GemCap**.

GemCap can be used in different ways.

- If you have cancer that can be removed with surgery (such as the Whipple's procedure), you may be offered GemCap after surgery to try stop the cancer coming back.
- If you have cancer that has grown close to major blood vessels near the pancreas (borderline resectable cancer), you may have GemCap to try to shrink the cancer to make surgery possible. We need more research into this, and you may be offered GemCap before surgery as part of a clinical trial.
- If you have locally advanced or advanced pancreatic cancer and surgery is not possible, you may be offered GemCap to try to control the growth of the cancer.

If you have advanced pancreatic cancer you may be offered capecitabine on its own, but this isn't used often and is only given if you have already had gemcitabine treatment.

Capecitabine and radiotherapy

Some people with borderline resectable or locally advanced pancreatic cancer have radiotherapy together with chemotherapy. This is called chemoradiotherapy.

If you have chemoradiotherapy, the chemotherapy drug that is normally used is capecitabine. The chemotherapy may make the cancer cells more sensitive to the radiotherapy, so that the radiotherapy works better.



Read more about how chemotherapy is used in our fact sheet **Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer**, or on our website at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemotherapy**

Read about radiotherapy for pancreatic cancer at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/radiotherapy**

How is capecitabine given?

Capecitabine is a tablet which you can take at home. Your chemotherapy team can tell you how many tablets you need to take. The tablets should be taken after eating a meal.

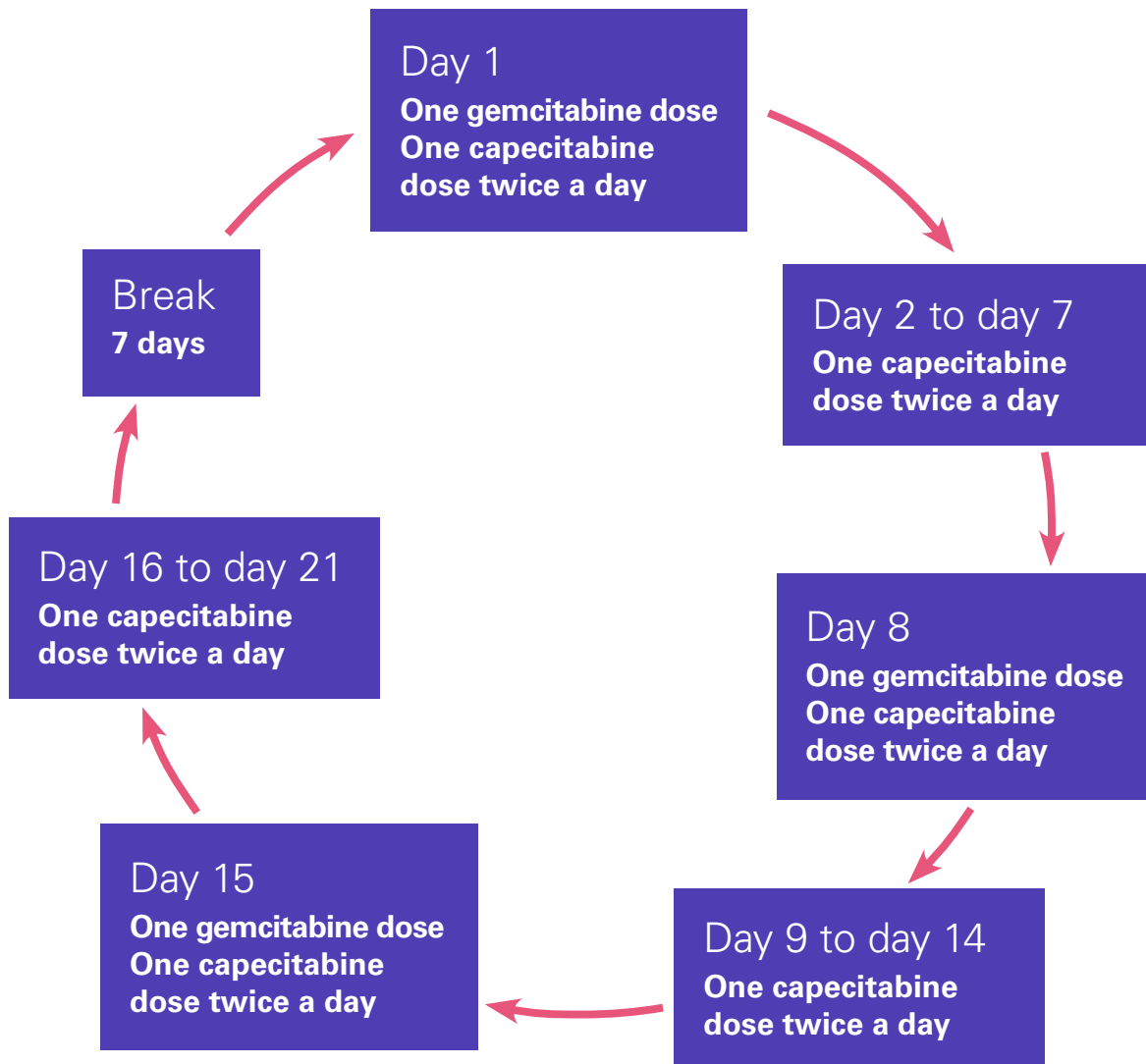
If you find it hard to swallow tablets, or are sick just after taking them, contact your chemotherapy team for advice. Don't cut or crush your capecitabine tablets without talking to your chemotherapy team first.

GemCap chemotherapy

If you are having capecitabine with gemcitabine (GemCap), this is given in a four-week cycle. This means that you will have treatment for three weeks, and then have a break for one week. This break allows your body to recover between treatments.

The number of GemCap cycles you have will depend on how the treatment is working and how chemotherapy affects you. Your chemotherapy team can tell you more about this.

You will take the capecitabine tablets every day, twice a day, for three weeks. You will also have gemcitabine once a week, through an infusion which takes 30 minutes. You may hear an infusion called a 'drip'.



Capecitabine and radiotherapy

If you are having capecitabine with radiotherapy, you will take capecitabine tablets on the days that you have radiotherapy. For example, you may have capecitabine and radiotherapy every day of the week (Mon-Fri), and then have a break from treatment at the weekend. Speak to your doctor or nurse about your treatment.



Read about how chemotherapy is given at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/havingchemotherapy

Read about gemcitabine at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/gemcitabine

What are the side effects of capecitabine?

Capecitabine can cause side effects, but these can affect everyone differently, and you may not get all of the side effects mentioned here.

Your chemotherapy team should give you information about any possible side effects and how to manage them. Make sure you ask them any questions you have. Knowing what to expect can help you deal with any side effects.

DPD-deficiency

Capecitabine is broken down in the body by an enzyme called dihydropyrimidine dehydrogenase (DPD). Some people have lower amounts of the DPD enzyme – which is known as DPD-deficiency.

People with DPD-deficiency can have side effects that are much worse than usual, especially the first few times they have capecitabine. These side effects include infections, runny poo (diarrhoea) and feeling or being sick. It is important to speak to your chemotherapy team if you think you may have DPD deficiency, or if you would like to know more about how this can affect your side effects.

Your chemotherapy team should give you an emergency number to call if you are unwell, or if you need information about any side effects. Your nurse will explain when to use this number. If you haven't been given a number, ask your nurse about this.

Common side effects

Infection

Capecitabine can increase your risk of getting an infection. **An infection is an emergency if you are having chemotherapy, and needs treating straight away.**

Signs of an infection include:

- a high temperature
- headaches and sore muscles
- a cough or sore throat
- having pain or burning when you pass urine
- feeling generally unwell or tired.

A high temperature is 37.5°C or 38°C depending on the advice of your chemotherapy team. If you have a high temperature, or any other signs of an infection, call your chemotherapy team on the emergency number, or go to A&E and tell them you are having chemotherapy.

You should also phone if you suddenly feel unwell and have flu-like symptoms, even if your temperature is normal or low (a low temperature is 35° and below).



Read more about infections and how they can be treated in our fact sheet **Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer**, or at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemotherapy

Fatigue (extreme tiredness)

Fatigue is a common side effect of capecitabine. It isn't the same as feeling tired. Fatigue can make you feel weak and have problems concentrating.

Some people find that the fatigue starts a few hours to a few days after having chemotherapy, and starts to get better after a few days. There are things that you can do to help with fatigue.



Read about fatigue, and how it can be managed, at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/fatigue

Feeling or being sick (nausea or vomiting)

This is a common side effect of capecitabine. You will normally be given anti-sickness medicines before your chemotherapy starts. If these medicines don't help, speak to your chemotherapy team about changing to a different medicine.

If you find it hard to swallow the capecitabine tablets, or you are sick just after taking them, call your chemotherapy team for advice.



Read more about feeling and being sick, and our tips for coping with it, at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/sickness

Sore hands and feet

Capecitabine can make the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet red and sore, and your skin may start to peel or blister. Your skin might also look shiny, feel tight and crack around the fingertips. Your doctor or nurse may give you a vitamin or creams to help with this. The soreness normally gets better when your chemotherapy finishes.

Sore mouth and mouth ulcers

Capecitabine can make your mouth sore, or cause mouth ulcers which can be uncomfortable. Tell your chemotherapy team about any problems with your mouth. They can make sure you don't have a mouth infection, and give you a mouthwash which should help.

Loss of appetite

During your treatment you may not feel like eating, and you may start to lose weight. Try eating small meals often. If your appetite doesn't get better after a few days, speak to your doctor or dietitian.



Read our tips for coping with a loss of appetite at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/diettips

Runny poo (diarrhoea)

If you have diarrhoea, make sure you drink lots of water. If you have it more than four times a day, tell your chemotherapy team. They can give you medicines to control it. You may be told to stop taking capecitabine, or your doctor can lower the dose.



Read our tips for coping with diarrhoea at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/diettips

Tummy pain

You may have some tummy pain or discomfort when you are having capecitabine. Or you may have indigestion, lots of wind or feel bloated. You may also have trouble emptying your bowels (constipation). Your doctor can give you medicines to help with these side effects.

Swelling (oedema)

Some people get swelling in their feet, ankles, legs, fingers or face. This is because of a build-up of fluid, which is called oedema.

This normally gets better by itself. If you have swelling in your feet, it may help to have your legs up on a cushion when you are sitting down. Your doctor may also be able to give you some medicines to help.

Anaemia (feeling tired or dizzy)

Capecitabine can lower the number of red blood cells in your blood. This is called anaemia, and can make you feel tired, dizzy or short of breath. Tell your chemotherapy team if you have any of these symptoms.

Less common side effects

- **Bruising and bleeding.** Capecitabine can lower the number of platelets in your blood – this is called thrombocytopenia. This can cause you to bruise more easily than normal, and you may be more likely to have nosebleeds or bleeding gums.
- **Joint and muscle pain.** Capecitabine can cause problems with your joints, such as swelling or pain. Your muscles may also feel weak or stiff.

- **Heart problems.** Capecitabine can cause chest pain. It can also make you feel short of breath, dizzy, or cause an irregular heartbeat. It is important to call your chemotherapy team straight away if you have any of these symptoms. Or go to A&E and tell them you are having chemotherapy.
- **Headaches.** Capecitabine can cause headaches. Tell your chemotherapy team if you have headaches, so that they can give you painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen to help. Always check your temperature before taking these painkillers. If your temperature is high, call your chemotherapy team on the emergency number straight away.
- **Risk of a blood clot in a vein.** Capecitabine can increase your risk of getting a blood clot in a vein. If you have any pain or swelling in one of your arms or legs, or you feel very short of breath, call your chemotherapy team straight away, or phone an ambulance. **A blood clot can be serious if it isn't treated.**

Speak to your chemotherapy team if you experience anything unusual, or if you would like more information.



Read more about blood clots in a vein, and the symptoms, on our website at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/bloodclots



If you have any questions about capecitabine or side effects, you can speak to our specialist nurses on our free Support Line.

Further information and support

Pancreatic Cancer UK services

We are here for everyone affected by pancreatic cancer.

We're here to support and listen

Our free and confidential Support Line is a lifeline for thousands of people affected by pancreatic cancer. Our specialist nurses understand the issues you might be facing and their expert help will support you in coping with pancreatic cancer.

Call free on **0808 801 0707** weekdays 10am-4pm,
or email **nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk**

We're here with the information you need

We have the most up-to-date information on everything you need to know about pancreatic cancer. We can help you every step of the way through diagnosis and treatment options to managing your symptoms and the care you receive.

Go to **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/informationandsupport**

Download or order our free publications at
pancreaticcancer.org.uk/publications or call **0808 801 0707**

Find an A-Z of medical words at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/medicalwords**

We're here so you can share

Our Forum is a supportive place where everyone affected by pancreatic cancer can be there for each other online, any time of day or night:

forum.pancreaticcancer.org.uk

Our Living with Pancreatic Cancer Support Days provide local face-to-face support in an informal setting for people with pancreatic cancer:

pancreaticcancer.org.uk/supportdays

Local support groups mean you can meet other people to share your experiences:

pancreaticcancer.org.uk/supportgroups

Useful organisations

Cancer Research UK

www.cancerresearchuk.org

Helpline: 0808 800 4040 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)

Information for anyone affected by cancer.

Healthtalk

www.healthtalk.org

Personal experiences presented in written, audio and video formats, including people talking about pancreatic cancer.

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk

Support Line: 0808 808 00 00 (Everyday 8am-8pm)

Provides practical, medical and financial support for anyone affected by cancer.

Maggie's Centres

www.maggiescentres.org

Tel: 0300 123 1801

Centres around the UK and online offer free, comprehensive support for anyone affected by cancer.

This fact sheet has been produced by the Support and Information Team at Pancreatic Cancer UK.

We make every effort to make sure that our services provide up-to-date, accurate information about pancreatic cancer. We hope that this information will add to the medical advice you have had, and help you make decisions about your treatment and care. This information should not replace advice from your medical team – please speak to your doctor, nurse or other members of your medical team about any questions.

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- Pancreatic Cancer UK Specialist Nurses

Email us at publications@pancreaticcancer.org.uk for references to the sources of information used to write this fact sheet.

Give us your feedback

We hope you have found this information helpful. We are always keen to improve our information so let us know if you have any comments or suggestions. Email us at publications@pancreaticcancer.org.uk or write to our Information Manager at the address below.

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