Capecitabine (Xeloda®)

This fact sheet is for anyone diagnosed with pancreatic cancer who would like to find out more about capecitabine chemotherapy to treat pancreatic cancer. It provides information about how capecitabine is given and the side effects.

Each hospital will do things slightly differently, and treatment will vary depending on your cancer, so speak to your doctor about your own situation.

You can also 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 support@pancreaticcancer.org.uk

Capecitabine is a tablet form of fluorouracil (5FU). It is usually given in combination with gemcitabine (GemCap) to treat advanced pancreatic cancer. Occasionally it may be used on its own as second-line treatment for patients who have already had gemcitabine as first-line treatment. It may also be used in chemoradiotherapy.

**How is capecitabine given?**

You can take capecitabine at home. You take the tablets twice a day, swallowing them whole with lots of water within 30 minutes of eating a meal.

If you are having GemCap chemotherapy, then capecitabine is taken on a four-week cycle. This means that you will take the tablets for three weeks, then have a break for one week.

If you are having capecitabine on its own, you will take it in a three-week cycle. You will take the tablets for two weeks, and then have a break for a week.

If you are having capecitabine combined with radiotherapy then you take it for the course of the radiotherapy treatment, usually only on the days you have your radiotherapy.

The exact number of cycles of capecitabine you have will depend on your treatment plan and how well you respond to treatment. Speak to your oncologist about the details of your treatment.
What are the side effects?
Capecitabine can cause side effects, although everyone is affected in different ways. It’s unusual to get all the possible side effects.

There are ways to manage the side effects, and you may be given medication to help with some side effects. For example, you may be prescribed anti-sickness medication to deal with feeling sick (nausea). If you are prescribed medication you should take it exactly as you are told.

Speak to your medical team if you get any side effects that you’re worried about, or that aren't being properly controlled. You should have been given a phone number to contact them on. They can help you manage the side effects.

Common side effects include the following.

- Feeling or being sick (nausea or vomiting). Your doctor or nurse can give you anti-sickness medication. Take it as soon as you feel sick. If this doesn’t work, speak to your GP to change to a different medication – there are lots available.
- Loose and watery stools (diarrhoea). Make sure you drink plenty of fluids, and let your doctor or nurse know as they can give you medication to control it. If the diarrhoea is severe, ring the hospital on the number you will have been given. You may be told to stop taking the capecitabine until the diarrhoea is better.
- Sore mouth or mouth ulcers – clean your teeth regularly with a soft toothbrush. Your doctor or nurse will be able to give you a mouthwash that should help.
- Abdominal bloating or discomfort, often cramp-like. If this happens call your doctor or nurse – they may tell you to stop taking the tablets until the discomfort improves.
- Loss of appetite – try to eat small meals regularly. If your appetite doesn’t improve after a few days, let your doctor know.
- Taste changes – such as a metallic taste. You might find that it helps to suck boiled sweets or use herbs in your food.
- Soreness, redness and peeling on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. Your doctor or nurse can prescribe cream or a vitamin to help with this. If the cream doesn’t work, let your chemotherapy team know straight away. It usually improves after a break from treatment. You might also find it helps to keep your hands and feet cool.
- Fatigue (extreme tiredness). Fatigue can be difficult to manage. Take it easy, and make sure you rest when you need to. You might find it helps to take some gentle exercise, such as going for a short walk.
when you feel able. A good well balanced diet, and sorting out any other side effects or symptoms of the cancer can also help.

- Pain in the joints or muscles, which may be relieved with painkillers.

Less common side effects include:

- Risk of infection from a low level of white blood cells called neutrophils (neutropenia). You may have headaches, aching muscles, a cough or sore throat or you may feel shivery and cold. This can be serious. You should contact the hospital straight away if your temperature goes above 37.5°C or 38°C (depending on the advice you’ve been given by your chemotherapy team) – or if you suddenly feel unwell, even if your temperature is normal.
- Bruising or bleeding, for example nosebleeds or bleeding gums. This is caused by a low level of platelets.
- Tiredness and breathlessness from anaemia, which is a low level of red blood cells. You may need a blood transfusion, which will help you feel better.
- Hair thinning.
- Headaches, which can be treated with painkillers.
- Chest pain. Capecitabine can affect how the heart works, so if you have any pain or tightness in your chest, your heartbeat feels irregular, or you feel breathless, contact the hospital straight away.
- Watery eyes – your doctor can prescribe eye drops.
- A blood clot forming in a blood vessel (thrombosis). If you have pain or swelling in your arms or legs or sudden shortness of breath, let your doctor or nurse know straight away. Read more about blood clots in a vein in our blood clot FAQ on our website at: www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk/dvtrisk.

Ask your medical team for advice on managing these or any other side effects you experience. You can also call our specialist nurses free on our Support Line.

Read more about chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer and looking after yourself during chemotherapy on website at: www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk. You can also read more information about capecitabine on the Macmillan Cancer Support website.
**Other sources of information and support**

**CancerHelp UK**
www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-help/
Cancer nurses answer questions 0808 800 4040 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)
Information for patients from Cancer Research UK

**Macmillan Cancer Support**
www.macmillan.org.uk
Freephone Cancerline 0808 808 00 00 (Mon-Fri 9am-8pm)
Provides practical, medical and financial support for anyone affected by cancer.

**Further information and support**
Pancreatic Cancer UK is the only national charity fighting pancreatic cancer on all fronts: Support, Information, Campaigning and Research. We are striving for a long and good life for everyone diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

**Support Line**
We run a confidential Support Line for anyone affected by pancreatic cancer. Our pancreatic cancer specialist nurses can provide individual specialist information about pancreatic cancer, treatment options and managing symptoms and side effects. They have time to listen, answer your questions and provide support.

Freephone: 0808 801 0707 (Monday to Friday, 10am-4pm)
Email support@pancreaticcancer.org.uk

**Information**
We provide information about pancreatic cancer, treatment options, side effects and living with pancreatic cancer. All our information is based on the latest evidence, and reviewed by health professionals and people affected by pancreatic cancer.

Go to [www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk](http://www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk)
Download and order publications at [www.pancreaticcancer.org/publications](http://www.pancreaticcancer.org/publications)
Support groups
There are pancreatic cancer support groups across the UK, where you can meet other people affected by pancreatic cancer, share experiences and find support.

Find your nearest support group on our website at www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk/supportgroups

Discussion forum
Join our online discussion forum to talk to others affected by pancreatic cancer. Members include people with pancreatic cancer as well as family and friends. They share their experiences and tips, and support each other.

Sign up on our website at www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk
This fact sheet has been produced by the Support and Information Team at Pancreatic Cancer UK. It has been reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by pancreatic cancer.

References to the sources of information used to write this fact sheet and an acknowledgement of the health professionals who reviewed the booklet are available on our website – www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemotherapy

Pancreatic Cancer UK makes every effort to make sure that its services provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate information about pancreatic cancer. We hope that this information will add to the medical advice you have received and help you to take part in decisions related to your treatment and care. Please do continue to talk to your doctor, specialist nurse or other members of your care team if you are worried about any medical issues.

Give us your feedback We hope you have found this information helpful. If you have any comments or suggestions about this fact sheet or any of our other publications, you can email publications@pancreaticcancer.org.uk or write to the Information Manager at the address below.

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