

Nab-paclitaxel (Abraxane®) for pancreatic cancer

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

Nab-paclitaxel is used with another chemotherapy drug called gemcitabine (Gemzar®). This may be an option for people with advanced pancreatic cancer.

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 also speak to our specialist nurses on our confidential Support Line. Call free on **0808 801 0707** or email **nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk**



Read more about the other chemotherapy drugs used for pancreatic cancer on our website 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 nab-paclitaxel used?

Nab-paclitaxel is used with another chemotherapy drug called gemcitabine. This may be a treatment option for people with cancer that has spread to other parts of the body (advanced pancreatic cancer).

Nab-paclitaxel with gemcitabine may be used if you can't have FOLFIRINOX, or gemcitabine and capecitabine (GemCap).

Nab-paclitaxel with gemcitabine may cause more side effects than gemcitabine alone, so you need to be well enough to deal with the possible side effects. Read more about side effects on page 4.



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 gemcitabine at: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/gemcitabine**

How is nab-paclitaxel given?

You will have your chemotherapy at the hospital as an outpatient. This means that you will go into hospital for treatment, but you will not need to stay overnight.

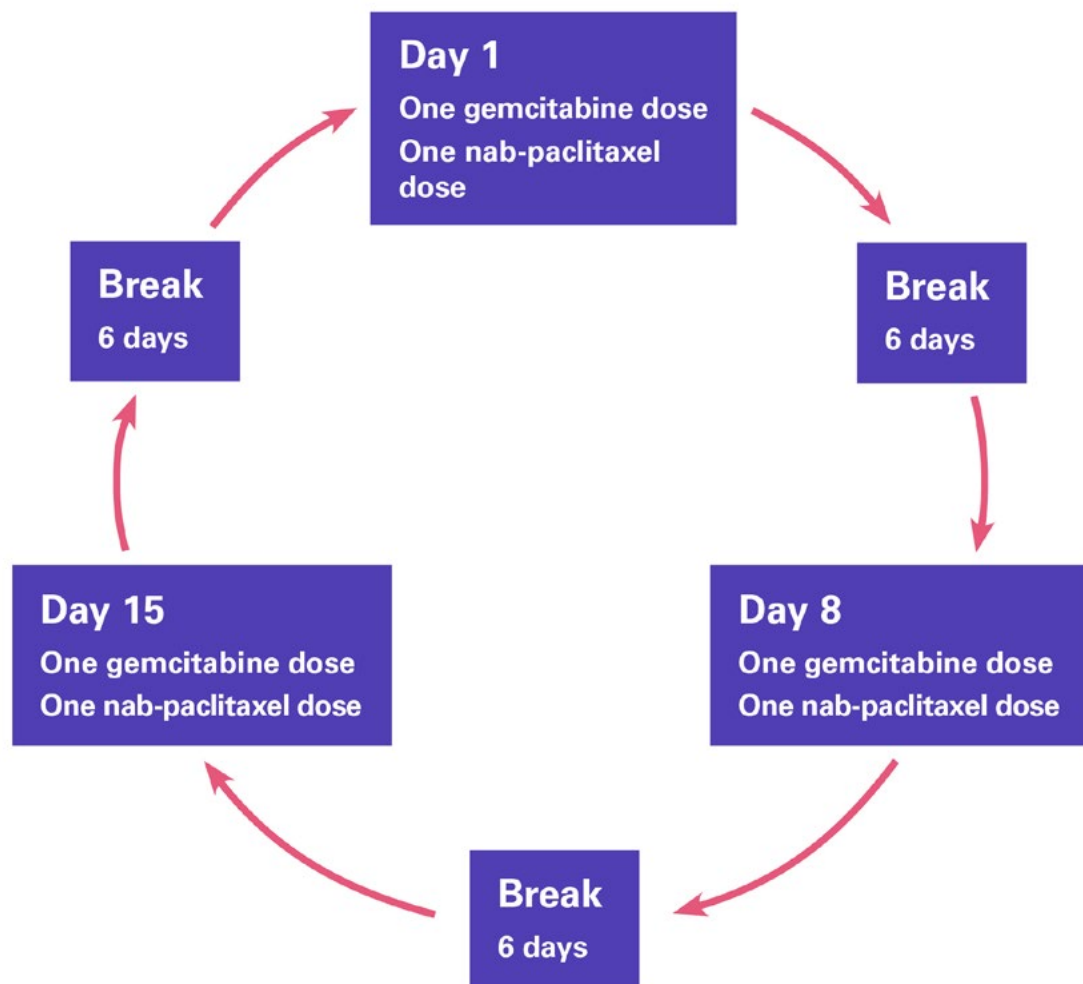
Nab-paclitaxel with gemcitabine is given in a four week cycle. This means that you will have nab-paclitaxel and gemcitabine once a week for three weeks, and then have a break for one week. The break allows your body to recover between treatments.

The number of 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.

Nab-paclitaxel and gemcitabine are given as an infusion into a vein. You may hear an infusion called a 'drip'. You will have the infusion through a cannula. This is a thin tube that is put into a vein in the back of your hand or lower arm.

Nab-paclitaxel and gemcitabine will normally be given on the same day. You will have nab-paclitaxel first, which takes 30 minutes. After this, you will have gemcitabine, which also takes 30 minutes. The cannula will be flushed out between each drug.

Diagram showing how nab-paclitaxel is given



Read more about how chemotherapy is given, including cannulas, at: pancreaticcancer.org.uk/havingchemotherapy

What are the side effects of nab-paclitaxel?

Nab-paclitaxel can cause side effects, but these can affect everyone differently, and you may not get all the side effects mentioned here. Your chemotherapy team should give you information about any possible side effects and how they are managed. Ask them any questions you have. You can also speak to our specialist nurses on our free Support Line.

Your chemotherapy team should give you a 24 hour emergency number to call if you are unwell, have any signs of infection, or if you need information about any side effects. Your nurse will explain when to use this number. If you have not been given a number, ask your nurse about this.



Read more about the side effects of chemotherapy in our fact sheet: **Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer**
Or at: pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemoeffects

Common side effects

Infection

Nab-paclitaxel can increase your risk of getting an infection. An infection is an emergency if you are having chemotherapy and needs to be treated straight away. Signs of an infection include:

- a high temperature – your chemotherapy team will tell you what a high temperature is
- feeling shivery and cold
- headaches
- sore muscles
- a cough or sore throat
- pain or burning when you pee
- feeling generally unwell or tired.

Call the 24 hour emergency number your chemotherapy team will have given you if you have signs of an infection. You should phone if you have any of these symptoms or feel suddenly unwell, even if your temperature is normal or low.



Read more about infections and how they can be treated in our fact sheet: **Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer**
Or on our website at: pancreaticcancer.org.uk/blood

Runny poo (diarrhoea)

If you have diarrhoea, try to drink as much water as you can. If you are finding it hard to drink enough fluids, contact your chemotherapy team. If you have diarrhoea more than four times a day, tell your chemotherapy team. They can give you medicines to control it, or they can lower the dose of nab-paclitaxel until the diarrhoea is better.



Read our tips for coping with diarrhoea on our website at: pancreaticcancer.org.uk/bowelhabits

Constipation

You may also have constipation (when you find it harder to poo). Drink as much water as you can manage and try to eat foods that are high in fibre, such as fruit and vegetables. Speak to your doctor about medicines that can help.

Fatigue (extreme tiredness)

Fatigue is a common side effect of nab-paclitaxel. It is not 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 can help with fatigue. See how the chemotherapy affects you and work out how much activity you can manage.

Nab-paclitaxel may also make you feel dizzy. Feeling tired and dizzy may affect your ability to drive. You might want to get someone else to drive you until you know if you are affected.



Read our tips for coping with fatigue on our website at: pancreaticcancer.org.uk/fatigue

Feeling or being sick (nausea or vomiting)

This is a common side effect of nab-paclitaxel. You will normally be given anti-sickness medicines to manage sickness. If these medicines don't help, speak to your doctor or nurse about changing to a different medicine.



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

Hair loss

Nab-paclitaxel may cause hair loss, but it should grow back once your treatment stops.

Tingling and numbness in your fingers and toes

Nab-paclitaxel can affect the nerves in your hands and feet, which can cause tingling and numbness (peripheral neuropathy). This normally gets better after your treatment, but for some people it may never go away. It can be worse in the cold, so wrap up warm if you are going outside. Talk to your chemotherapy team if you have any tingling or numbness in your fingers or toes.



Read more about peripheral neuropathy at: pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemoeffects

Bruising and bleeding

Nab-paclitaxel 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. If you have a nosebleed that does not stop after five minutes, call the emergency number.

Appetite loss

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



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

Sore mouth and mouth ulcers

Nab-paclitaxel can make your mouth sore, or cause mouth ulcers which can be painful. Tell your chemotherapy team about any problems you have with your mouth. They can make sure you don't have a mouth infection and give you a mouthwash which should help. You should also tell them if you have white spots in your mouth. This is a sign of oral thrush, which is normally easy to treat.

Anaemia (feeling tired or dizzy)

Nab-paclitaxel 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. If your red blood cell level is very low, you may need to be given blood through a drip. This is called a blood transfusion.

Wheezing or feeling short of breath

Nab-paclitaxel can cause wheezing, a cough, a high temperature or shortness of breath. If this happens, tell your chemotherapy team straight away. They can arrange for you to have tests to check how your lungs are working.

Swelling (oedema)

Some people have 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 medicines to help.

Joint and muscle pain

Nab-paclitaxel can cause problems with your joints, such as swelling or pain. Your muscles may also feel weak or stiff. Tell your chemotherapy team if you have these side effects. They can give you painkillers to help. Make sure that you check your temperature before taking any paracetamol or ibuprofen. If you have a high temperature, call the emergency number straight away.

Less common side effects

Risk of a blood clot in a vein

Nab-paclitaxel can increase your risk of a blood clot in a vein, but this is not very common. If you have any pain or swelling in one of your arms or legs, or you feel very short of breath, call the emergency number straight away. Or phone an ambulance and tell them you are having chemotherapy. A blood clot can be serious if it's not treated.



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

Heart problems

Nab-paclitaxel can cause heart palpitations or an irregular heartbeat. Palpitations are when you feel your heartbeat more than usual. Call the emergency number straight away if you get this. If you have chest pain, go straight to A&E and tell them you are having chemotherapy.

Headaches

Nab-paclitaxel can cause headaches. Tell your chemotherapy team if you have headaches. They can give you painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen. Make sure that you check your temperature before taking paracetamol or ibuprofen. If you have a high temperature, call the emergency number straight away.

Sore, itchy eyes

Nab-paclitaxel can cause sore, itchy or watery eyes. Tell your chemotherapy team if this happens, as they may need to give you some eye drops. Some people get blurred vision when taking nab-paclitaxel, but this is not common.

Nail changes

Nab-paclitaxel can cause changes to your nails. You may get ridges or lines across them or they may break more easily. Your chemotherapy team can give you advice on looking after your nails. Your nails will usually go back to normal once they grow after treatment ends.



If you have any questions about nab-paclitaxel or side effects, speak to your chemotherapy team. You can also 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.

Our specialist nurses are here to talk now

If your world has been turned upside down by a pancreatic cancer diagnosis, we are here to talk now. We can answer your questions, recommend practical steps and provide the emotional support you and those close to you need, when you need it most.

Call free on **0808 801 0707** or email [**nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk**](mailto:nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk)

Expert information

Our free information covers everything about pancreatic cancer to help you understand your diagnosis, ask questions, make decisions and live as well as you can.

Go to: [**pancreaticcancer.org.uk/information**](http://pancreaticcancer.org.uk/information)

Download or order our free publications at:
[**pancreaticcancer.org.uk/publications**](http://pancreaticcancer.org.uk/publications) or call **0808 801 0707**

Our online forum

The forum is a supportive online space where everyone affected by pancreatic cancer can be there for each other at any time.

Go to: [**forum.pancreaticcancer.org.uk**](http://forum.pancreaticcancer.org.uk)

Living with Pancreatic Cancer Online Support Sessions

Our online support sessions are hosted by our specialist pancreatic cancer nurses and will give you the chance to connect with others who have also been diagnosed.

Go to: [**pancreaticcancer.org.uk/supportsessions**](http://pancreaticcancer.org.uk/supportsessions)

Real life stories

Read other people's experiences of pancreatic cancer to find out how they coped with their diagnosis and treatment and their tips on looking after themselves.

Go to: [**pancreaticcancer.org.uk/stories**](http://pancreaticcancer.org.uk/stories)

Useful organisations

Cancer Hair Care

www.cancerhaircare.co.uk

Telephone: 01438 311322

Support with hair loss and hair care during cancer treatment.

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 (Every day, 8am-8pm)

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

Maggie's Centres

www.maggies.org

Telephone: 0300 123 1801

Centres around the UK and online offer free practical, emotional and social 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 this 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 the medical team – please speak to your doctor, nurse or other members of your medical team about any questions.

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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