

Oxaliplatin (Eloxatin®) for pancreatic cancer

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

Oxaliplatin is normally given together with other chemotherapy drugs to treat 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.

Contents

How is oxaliplatin used?	2
How is oxaliplatin given?.....	3
How is FOLFOX given?	4
What are the side effects of oxaliplatin?	5
Further information and support	10



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 chemotherapy in our fact sheet:

Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer

Or on our website at: pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemotherapy

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

How is oxaliplatin used?

Oxaliplatin is normally given together with other drugs to treat pancreatic cancer.

FOLFIRINOX

Oxaliplatin is one of the drugs used in **FOLFIRINOX**:

- FOL – folinic acid (leucovorin)
- F – fluorouracil (5FU)
- IRIN – irinotecan
- OX – oxaliplatin.

FOLFIRINOX can be used in different ways.

- If you have cancer that can be removed with surgery, you may be offered FOLFIRINOX after surgery to try to stop the cancer coming back.
- If you have borderline resectable cancer, you may have FOLFIRINOX to try to shrink the cancer to make surgery possible.
- If you have locally advanced or advanced pancreatic cancer, you may have FOLFIRINOX to try to control the growth of the cancer.



Read more about FOLFIRINOX and how it is used on our website at: pancreaticcancer.org.uk/folfirinox

FOLFOX

Oxaliplatin is also used in **FOLFOX**:

- FOL – folinic acid (leucovorin)
- F – fluorouracil (5FU)
- OX – oxaliplatin.

FOLFOX may be used if you have locally advanced or advanced pancreatic cancer. It is used for people who have already had gemcitabine with capecitabine (GemCap) or gemcitabine with nab-paclitaxel.

How is oxaliplatin given?

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

Oxaliplatin is given as an infusion into a vein. You may hear an infusion called a 'drip'. You will have the infusion of oxaliplatin through a cannula, or through a central line. A cannula is a thin tube which is put into a vein in the back of your hand or lower arm. A central line, such as a PICC line or a portacath, is a long tube that is put into a vein in your arm or chest. Part of the tube remains outside the body and is attached to a drip to give you the chemotherapy.



Read more about how chemotherapy is given, including cannulas and central lines, at:

pancreaticcancer.org.uk/havingchemotherapy

Read about FOLFIRINOX and how it is given at:

pancreaticcancer.org.uk/folfirinox

Reaction to the chemotherapy

Some people have a reaction while oxaliplatin is being given.

Signs of a reaction are:

- an itchy rash
- feeling dizzy or faint
- or feeling short of breath.

A reaction needs treating straight away, so if you have any of these or any other unusual symptoms, tell your chemotherapy team.

How is FOLFOX given?

FOLFOX is given in a two week cycle. On the first day of each cycle you will have an infusion of oxaliplatin and folinic acid. You will then have an injection of fluourouracil into a vein.

After this you will have an infusion of fluourouracil over 46 hours. This is given through a small pump attached to your central line. You can have this at home by attaching the pump to a belt and carrying it around with you. You will then have a break from chemotherapy for the next 12 days.

Each chemotherapy team will give the FOLFOX drugs slightly differently. Speak to your chemotherapy team about how you will have FOLFOX.

What are the side effects of oxaliplatin?

Oxaliplatin 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 tell you about possible side effects and how they are managed. Ask them any questions you have. Knowing what to expect can help you to cope with any side effects.

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 haven't been given a number, ask your nurse about this.

Common side effects

Infection

Oxaliplatin 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

Tingling and numbness in your fingers and toes

Oxaliplatin can affect the nerves in your hands and feet, which can cause tingling and numbness (peripheral neuropathy). This normally gets better after your treatment finishes, but for some people it may never go away. It can feel 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

Feeling or being sick (nausea or vomiting)

This is a common side effect of oxaliplatin. You will normally be given anti-sickness medicines to manage sickness. If these medicines don't help, speak to your chemotherapy team 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**

Fatigue (extreme tiredness)

Fatigue is a side effect of oxaliplatin. 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.

Oxaliplatin may also cause dizziness. Feeling tired and dizzy can 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

Problems swallowing and breathing (laryngeal spasm)

Oxaliplatin can affect your throat, which can make it hard to swallow or breathe. If this happens when you are being given oxaliplatin, tell your nurse straight away. They may stop the infusion of oxaliplatin while they give you medicine to help with this.

You may also get this side effect in the first few hours after having oxaliplatin, but this is normally only if you are out in the cold or having a cold drink. It should stop a few days after your treatment. Speak to your chemotherapy team about how to prevent this.

Sore mouth and mouth ulcers

Oxaliplatin 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.

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 appetite loss on our website at:
pancreaticcancer.org.uk/diettips

Taste changes

Oxaliplatin may cause a funny taste in your mouth. Some people say this tastes like metal or cardboard. You may find that food loses its flavour, or you stop enjoying some foods or drinks. Taste changes normally get better once you finish your chemotherapy.



Read our tips for coping with taste changes on our website at:
pancreaticcancer.org.uk/diettips

Bruising and bleeding

Oxaliplatin can lower the number of platelets in your blood. This is called thrombocytopenia. You may bruise more easily than normal and may be more likely to have nosebleeds or bleeding gums. If you have a nosebleed that doesn't stop after five minutes, call the emergency number.

Anaemia (feeling tired or dizzy)

Oxaliplatin 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 cells through a drip. This is called a blood transfusion.

Hair loss

Oxaliplatin may cause your hair to thin, or you may lose some hair – but it should grow back once your treatment stops.

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. The dose of oxaliplatin may be lowered, or your chemotherapy may be delayed until the diarrhoea is better.



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

Constipation

Constipation is when you find it harder to poo. Drink as much water as you can manage and try to eat high fibre foods such as fruit and vegetables. Gentle exercise such as walking can also help. Speak to your doctor about medicines that can help.

Joint and bone pain

Oxaliplatin can cause problems with your joints, such as swelling or pain. Tell your doctor or nurse if you have this side effect. They can give you painkillers to help. Make sure that you check your temperature before taking paracetamol or ibuprofen. If you have a high temperature, call the emergency number straight away.

Less common side effects

Eye problems

Oxaliplatin can cause sore, itchy or watery eyes. Your doctor or nurse may need to give you some eye drops. Some people get blurred vision when taking oxaliplatin, but this is less common.

Risk of a blood clot in a vein

Oxaliplatin can increase your risk of 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 the emergency number. 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



If you have any questions about oxaliplatin or side effects, speak to your chemotherapy team. You can also speak to our specialist nurses on our free Support Line.



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

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.

Pancreatic Cancer UK

Westminster Tower
3 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7SP

020 3535 7090
enquiries@pancreaticcancer.org.uk
pancreaticcancer.org.uk

© Pancreatic Cancer UK April 2022
Review date April 2024

Registered charity number 1112708 (England and Wales), and SC046392 (Scotland)