

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.

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

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Read more about chemotherapy in our fact sheet:

[Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer](#)

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

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

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). It is an option for people who haven't had any chemotherapy yet.

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**

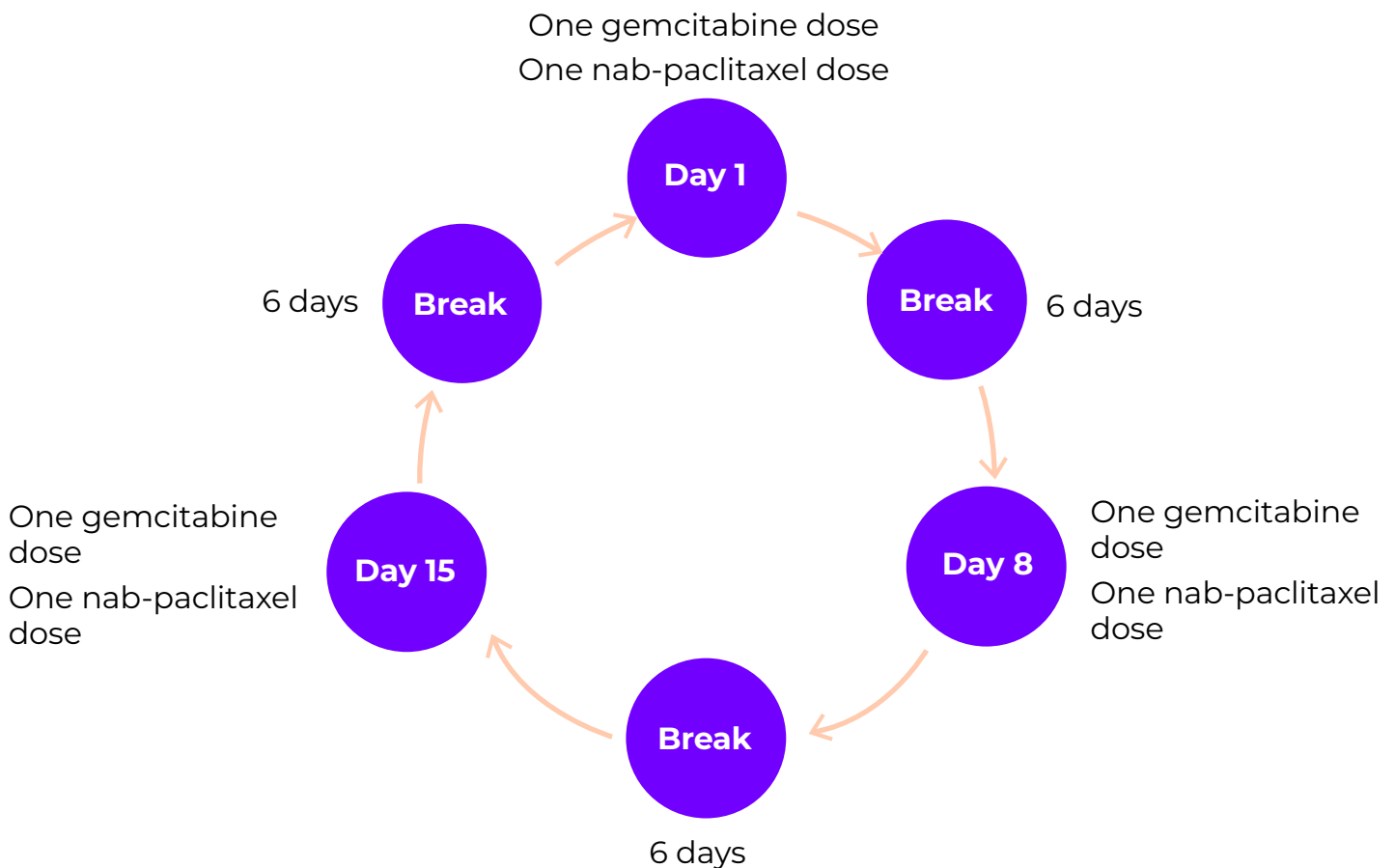
Read about gemcitabine at: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/gemcitabine**

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.

Diagram showing how nab-paclitaxel and gemcitabine are given



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 which 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.

Read more about cannulas and see a diagram on our website at: pancreaticcancer.org.uk/havingchemotherapy

What are the side effects of nab-paclitaxel?

Nab-paclitaxel can cause side effects. 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 or have any signs of infection. Or if you need information about any side effects. Your oncology specialist nurse or chemotherapy nurse will explain when to use this number. If you haven't been given a number, ask them about this.

Read more about the side effects of chemotherapy in our fact sheet: [Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer](#)

Or on our website 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 or low temperature – your chemotherapy team will tell you what to watch out for
- 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 at: pancreaticcancer.org.uk/blood

Runny poo (diarrhoea)

If you have diarrhoea, try to drink as much water as you can manage. Call the 24 hour emergency number if you are finding it hard to drink enough fluids or have diarrhoea more than four times a day. They can give you medicines to control the diarrhoea, or they can lower the dose of nab-paclitaxel until it is better.

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

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. Gentle exercise may also help.

Fatigue (extreme tiredness)

Fatigue is a common side effect of nab-paclitaxel. 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 a few days later. See how the chemotherapy affects you and work out how much activity you can manage. There are things that can help with fatigue.

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 but you will be given anti-sickness medicines to stop you feeling or being sick. If these don't help, call the emergency number. You may be able to change 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. It can be worse in the cold, so wrap up warm if you are going outside.

It's important to tell your chemotherapy team about any tingling or numbness, so it does not become a long term problem.

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 make you 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 mouth problems you have. They can make sure you don't have a mouth infection and give you a mouthwash to 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 (low red blood cells)

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 you have these symptoms, call the 24 hour emergency number. If your red blood cell level is very low, you may need to be given a blood transfusion through a drip.

Wheezing or feeling short of breath

Nab-paclitaxel can cause wheezing, a cough, a high temperature or shortness of breath. If this happens, call the 24 hour emergency number. You may need 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. 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. You can take painkillers to help. Make sure that you check your temperature before taking any paracetamol or ibuprofen. If the painkillers don't help or you have a high temperature, call the 24 hour 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 an arm or leg, or you feel very short of breath, call the 24 hour 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 24 hour 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. Painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen can help. Make sure that you check your temperature before taking paracetamol or ibuprofen. If you have a high temperature, call the 24 hour 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 having 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.

More information and support

We are here for you

If you or someone you care about has pancreatic cancer, we are here to help.

Find out more at: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/support**

Our specialist nurse Support Line

Our specialist nurses are experts in pancreatic cancer. They can talk for as long as you need, as often as you like. Whether you have a long list of questions or don't know where to start, they will provide practical, honest information to help you make the right choice for you.

Call free on **0808 801 0707** or email **nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk**

Information about pancreatic cancer

Our website, videos and publications can answer your questions. The information can help you understand what you have heard from your medical team, and make decisions about your treatment and care.

Go to: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/information**

Download or order our free publications at:

pancreaticcancer.org.uk/publications or call **0808 801 0707**

Real life stories

Whether you want to read other people's stories or tell your own, sharing experiences of pancreatic cancer could help.

Go to: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/stories**

Webinars

Our regular webinars cover topics including diet, wellbeing and treatment. They are hosted by our friendly nurses and other experts, are informal, and you can ask questions. You can look back at previous sessions, or sign up to one.

Go to: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/webinars**

Useful organisations

Cancer Focus Northern Ireland

cancerfocusni.org

Nurse line: 0800 783 3339 (Mon, Weds, Fri, 9am-1pm)

Care and support for people affected by cancer and their families in Northern Ireland.

Cancer Research UK

cancerresearchuk.org

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

Information for anyone affected by cancer.

Macmillan Cancer Support

macmillan.org.uk

Support Line: 0808 808 0000 (7 days a week, 8am-8pm)

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

Maggie's

maggies.org

Tel: 0300 123 1801

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

Tenovus Cancer Care

tenovuscancercare.org.uk

Tel: 0808 808 1010

Advice and support for people affected by cancer in Wales.

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

Queen Elizabeth House
4 St Dunstan's Hill
London
EC3R 8AD

020 3535 7090

enquiries@pancreaticcancer.org.uk
pancreaticcancer.org.uk