

Melphalan (Alkeran®)

What is melphalan?

Melphalan is a chemotherapy drug used to treat a variety of cancers. It can be given alone or in combination with other chemotherapy agents.

How will I receive melphalan?

Melphalan is given as an injection in your vein (Intravenous) or as an oral tablet.

What are the common side effects?

Please see, “Managing Symptoms at Home”, in the manual and refer to the Symptom Management section.

What you may expect?	What should you do?
Decreased blood counts (typically lowered white blood cell count, lowered platelet count) will occur following melphalan therapy. You may develop fevers or infections, and may bruise/bleed more easily. Your doctor will test your blood frequently to monitor your blood counts. You may receive platelet transfusions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report any signs or symptoms of infection, fever, excessive bleeding, or bruising to your doctor or nurse.
Fevers and infection may occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay away from crowds and people with colds, flu, or other infections Keep your mouth clean to prevent infections. You may brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush. Notify your physician or nurse if you have a fever, chills, or sweating.
Mucositis (development of mouth sores) can occur during therapy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See the “Mouth Pain/Mucositis” section of the manual Notify your doctor or nurse if you cannot eat or drink fluids.
Nausea/vomiting (especially with high doses) can occur during and following melphalan therapy. Nausea/vomiting can last up to several days after the end of melphalan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medications to prevent nausea will be prescribed to you. Take them as directed by your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse. It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it

therapy	<p>once it has occurred.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of liquids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts • For breakthrough nausea/vomiting you may take medication as prescribed to you by your physician. • Notify your medical team if you are experiencing uncontrolled nausea/vomiting.
Diarrhea may occur early after treatment (less than 24 hours) or have a later onset (after 24 hours).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will be given an anti-diarrhea medication to control this side effect. • Avoid dairy products and other foods that cause diarrhea, such as fried, fatty, or spicy foods. • Drink plenty of water. • If the diarrhea becomes severe, or you have 5 loose stools per day, call your doctor.
Signs of lung damage (difficulty breathing, shortness of breath) can occur years following therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify your doctor if you experience difficulty breathing.
Melphalan can damage sperm or cause sterility in men. It can temporarily or permanently stop the menstrual cycle in women. Women are at a higher risk of sterility than men.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are pregnant OR plan to have children, discuss this with your physician before receiving treatment. • Use an effective form of birth control while you or your partner is being treated with melphalan. • Notify your doctor immediately if you or your partner becomes pregnant. • Contact your doctor if you or your partner has missed any menstrual cycles while receiving therapy.
Secondary cancers (such as leukemia and other blood cancers) can occur years following melphalan treatment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss with your doctor about the potential risk of developing a new cancer.

These are the most common side effects. Others may occur. Please report any problems to your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse.

Call and Seek Help Immediately If You Have:

- Signs of an infection such as fever, chills, cough, pain or burning when you urinate.
- Signs of uncontrolled bleeding such as nosebleeds, black tarry stools, blood in the urine or severe bruising.

- Allergic reaction including itching or hives, swelling in the face or hands, swelling or tingling in the mouth or throat, tightness in the chest, or difficulty breathing.

Contact Your Nurse or Doctor If You Have:

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. If you are taking melphalan by mouth and vomiting immediately following your dose, contact your doctor immediately for further instructions.
- Redness, swelling or pain at your catheter site.
- Yellow discoloration of the eyes or skin.
- Painful mouth sores that prevent you from eating and/or drinking fluids.
- Missed any doses of oral melphalan.
- Missed menstrual cycle(s).
- Skin rash and hives.
- Signs of gout such as pain, swelling, and/or warmth in the joints (such as elbows, big toes, etc).

Special Instructions

Do not take melphalan if you have had an allergic reaction to it in the past. Inform your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Use birth control when receiving chemotherapy.

Drug-Drug Interactions

Drug interactions have occurred between melphalan and aspirin, aspirin containing products (including Alka-Seltzer® and various combination cold remedies), Cimetidine (Tagamet®), Famotidine (Pepcid®), Ranitidine (Zantac®), Nizatidine (Axid®), Cyclosporine (Sandimmune®, Neoral®, Gengraf®), and vaccines (including flu vaccines). Notify your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse if you are currently taking these medications. Do not take any of these medications while you are receiving melphalan unless your doctor has given such approval. DO NOT take any other medications including over-the-counter products, vitamins, nutritional supplements, and/or other herbal products before speaking to your doctor or pharmacist.

Drug-Food Interactions

DO NOT drink alcohol while you taking melphalan.

For more complete information please request an additional teaching sheet from the National Library of Medicine at www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginformation.html, or your nurse, pharmacist, or Resource Center.