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Etoposide

VP-16

This handout explains the drug etoposide, which is used to treat cancer. The handout includes how to manage common side effects.

What is etoposide?

Etoposide is a *chemotherapy* drug. It is used to treat lung cancer, testicle cancer, leukemia, and other cancers. It is also called VP-16.

How do I take it?

Take your etoposide capsules:

- With or without food
- At the same time each day
- Whole (do **not** open or dissolve the capsules)

If you cannot swallow the capsules whole, talk with your care team at Alvord Brain Tumor Center (ABTC).



Be sure to take your etoposide exactly as prescribed.

What if I miss a dose?

If you miss your dose of etoposide or vomit after taking a dose:

- **Do NOT take another dose to make up for the dose you missed.**
- Take your next dose at the scheduled time.
- Tell your care team at ABTC you have missed a dose.

How do I store the medicine?

Keep the bottle of etoposide in the refrigerator.

What are the side effects?

Here are some of the side effects linked to etoposide:

- **Diarrhea:** We will give you a prescription for *loperamide*. This medicine is used to treat diarrhea. Use it as directed. Call your ABTC nurse if you have more than 3 watery stools in 24 hours.
- **Rash:** If you get a rash while taking etoposide, call your ABTC nurse.

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- **Hair loss (*alopecia*):** Some people choose to wear scarves, caps, or wigs while they are taking etoposide. Your hair will grow back after treatment is over.
- **Decreased white blood cells:** Chemotherapy lowers the number of white blood cells in your body. This puts you at risk for infection. Call your ABTC nurse if you have any of these signs of infection:
  - Fever higher than 100.4°F (38°C)
  - Burning when you urinate
  - A sore that gets red, has drainage, or does not heal
  - An ongoing cough with mucus
- **Decreased platelets:** Call your ABTC nurse if you have:
  - A bloody nose that bleeds for more than 5 minutes even when you apply pressure
  - A lot of bleeding from your gums when you floss or brush
  - A cut that keeps oozing even when you apply pressure

  Seek medical care **right away** if you:
  - Have severe headaches
  - See blood in your urine or stool
  - Cough up blood
  - Have bleeding that won't stop
- **Nausea or vomiting:**
  - Take ondansetron (Zofran) 1 hour before your daily dose of etoposide. Also take it as needed for nausea. Read your prescription for dose and timing.
  - Call your ABTC nurse if ondansetron does not ease nausea or vomiting.
  - Help lessen nausea by eating small meals often during the day, instead of eating 3 larger meals.
- **Fertility:** Etoposide may affect your ability to have a child. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you have questions about fertility.

Safety Precautions

Contraception (Birth Control)

- If you are of childbearing age, use reliable birth control during therapy and for at least 1 month after your last dose.

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- If you were assigned female at birth:
  - You will have a pregnancy test done before you start taking etoposide.
  - Do **not** become pregnant or breastfeed while you are taking etoposide.
- If you were assigned male at birth, do **not** get a partner pregnant while you are taking etoposide.

Handling

- **Only** the patient should touch the etoposide capsules.
- If a caregiver must handle the capsules, they should:
  - Wear disposable gloves.
  - Wash their hands after handling.
- Caregivers must also wear gloves when helping clean up any of the patient's bodily fluids.

Vaccines

While you are taking etoposide:

- Avoid live vaccines.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has received a live vaccine within the last 6 weeks.
- Talk with your provider before getting any vaccination.

Alcohol

Please avoid alcohol on the days you take etoposide. Talk with your ABTC team if not drinking alcohol on your chemotherapy days would be hard for you.

Discarding Unused Etoposide

If you have any unused etoposide:

- Do **not** throw it in the trash.
- Do **not** flush it down the toilet or sink.
- Talk with your provider or pharmacist about how to safely discard leftover capsules.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

If you have questions about your etoposide therapy:

- Send us a message on eCare.
- Weekdays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.:
  - ❑ For Dr. Graber's team, call 206.597.3171
  - ❑ For Dr. McGranahan's team, call 206.598.5907
  - ❑ For Dr. Taylor's team, call 206.597.3008
  - ❑ For Dr. Venur's team, call 206.598.9467

  After hours and on weekends and holidays, you will be able to talk with a Community Care Line nurse or leave a message for your team.

To schedule appointments:

Call the ABTC front desk at 206.598.2282.

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