

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 (Abraxane®) and how it is given.

Nab-paclitaxel (Abraxane®) is given with another chemotherapy drug called gemcitabine. This may be a treatment 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.

Contents

How is nab-paclitaxel used?.....	2
How is nab-paclitaxel given?.....	2
What are the side effects of nab-paclitaxel?.....	4
Further information and support.....	9



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



Read about the other chemotherapy treatments 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 pancreatic cancer that has spread away from the pancreas to other parts of the body (advanced pancreatic cancer).

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

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

Speak to your chemotherapy team about which treatment may be best for you.



Read more about how chemotherapy is used in our fact sheet **Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer**, or on our website at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemotherapy**

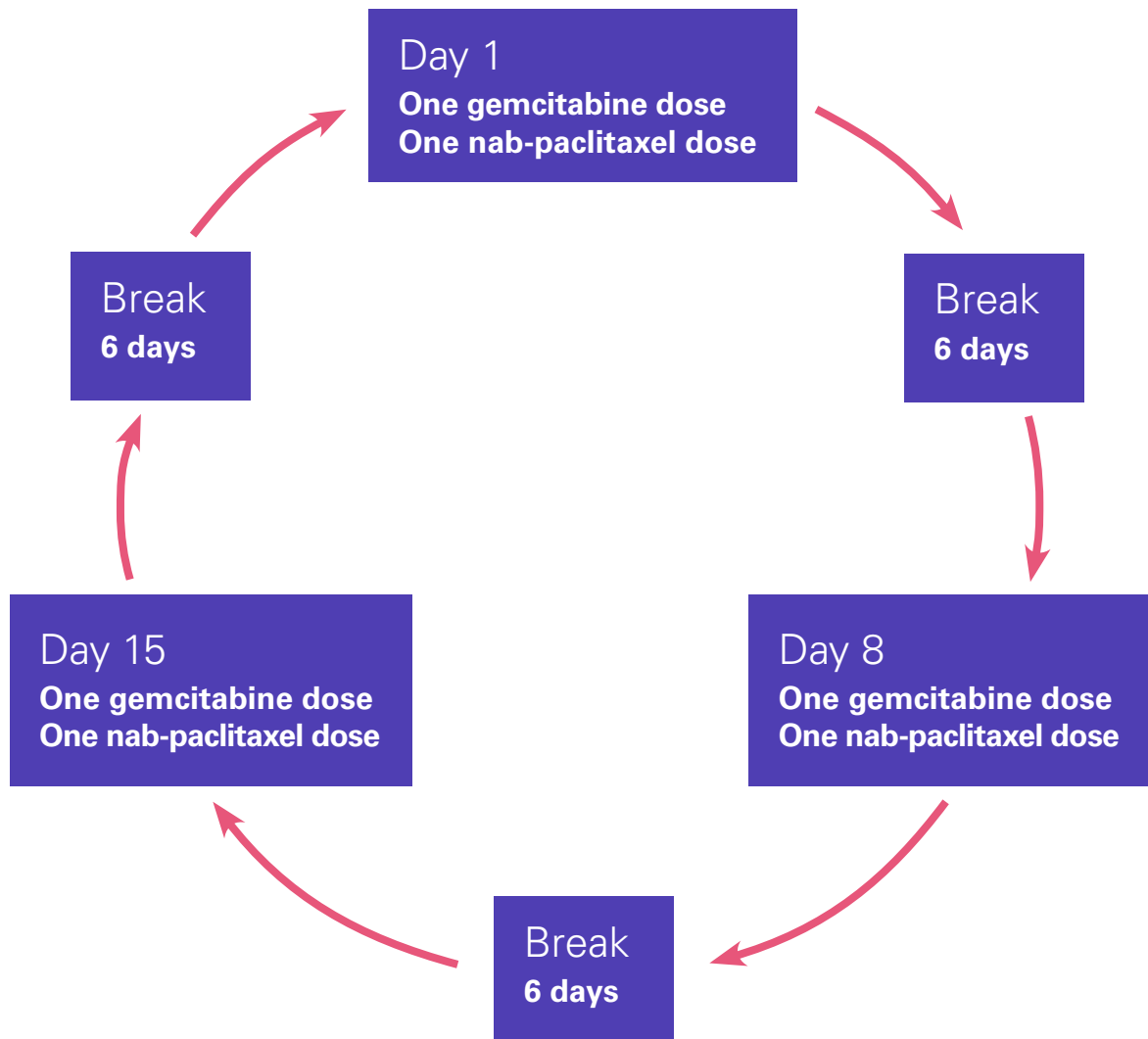
How is nab-paclitaxel given?

You will have your chemotherapy at the hospital as an outpatient. This means that you will go into hospital for treatment, but you won't 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 from treatment for a week. The break allows your body to recover. The number of cycles you have will depend on how the treatment is working and how chemotherapy affects you. Your doctor or nurse 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 of these drugs through a cannula, which 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 an infusion of nab-paclitaxel first, which takes 30 minutes. After this, you will have gemcitabine, which also takes 30 minutes.



Read information on treatment cycles and how chemotherapy is given 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 of the side effects mentioned here.

Your chemotherapy team should give you information about any possible side effects and how to manage them. Make sure that you ask them any questions you have. Knowing what to expect can help you to deal with any side effects.

Your chemotherapy team should give you an emergency number to call if you are unwell, 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

Nab-paclitaxel can increase your risk of getting an infection. **An infection is an emergency if you are having chemotherapy, and needs treating straight away.**

Signs of an infection include:

- a high temperature
- feeling shivery and cold
- headaches and sore muscles
- a cough or sore throat
- pain or burning when you pass urine
- feeling generally unwell or tired.

A high temperature is 37.5°C or 38°C depending on the advice of your chemotherapy team. If you have a high temperature, or any other signs of an infection, call your chemotherapy team on the emergency number, or go to A&E and tell them you are having chemotherapy.

You should also phone your chemotherapy team if you suddenly feel unwell and have flu-like symptoms, even if your temperature is normal or low (a low temperature is 35°C and below).



Read more about infections and how they can be treated in our fact sheet **Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer**, or at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemotherapy

Bowel problems

If you have runny poo (diarrhoea), make sure you drink lots of water. 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.

You may also have trouble emptying your bowels (constipation). If this happens, try to eat foods that are high in fibre, such as fruit and vegetables. Gentle exercise such as walking can also help. Speak to your doctor about medicines that can help.



Read our tips for coping with diarrhoea at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/diettips

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 after a few days. There are things that you can do to help with fatigue.

Nab-paclitaxel may also make you feel dizzy. Feeling tired and dizzy can affect your ability to drive. If you have these side effects, talk to your doctor about driving.



Read about managing fatigue at pancreaticcancer.org.uk/fatigue

Feeling and being sick (nausea and vomiting)

This is a common side effect of nab-paclitaxel. You will normally be given anti-sickness medicines before your chemotherapy starts. 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 at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/sickness**

Hair loss

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



Read about hair loss in our fact sheet **Chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer**, or on our website at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/chemotherapy**

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 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.

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. Speak to your chemotherapy team straight away about any of these side effects. If you have a nosebleed that doesn't stop after five minutes, call your chemotherapy team who will be able to help.

Loss of appetite

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



Read our tips for dealing with a loss of appetite at
pancreaticcancer.org.uk/diettips

Sore mouth and mouth ulcers

Nab-paclitaxel can make your mouth sore, or cause mouth ulcers which can be uncomfortable. 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 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.

Headaches

Nab-paclitaxel can cause headaches. Tell your chemotherapy team if you have headaches – they can give you painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen to help. These painkillers can lower your temperature, which can hide the symptoms of an infection (see page 4). You should always check your temperature before taking these painkillers. If your temperature is high, call your chemotherapy team on 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 isn't common.

Less common side effects

- **Heart problems.** Nab-paclitaxel can cause heart palpitations or an irregular heartbeat. Palpitations are when you feel your heartbeat more than usual. Call your chemotherapy team straight away if you get this side effect. Or go to A&E and tell them that you are having chemotherapy.
- **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 your chemotherapy team straight away, or phone an ambulance. **A blood clot is serious if it isn't treated.**

Speak to your chemotherapy team if you feel anything unusual, or if you would like more information.



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 nab-paclitaxel or side effects, you can 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.

We're here to support and listen

Our free and confidential Support Line is a lifeline for thousands of people affected by pancreatic cancer. Our specialist nurses understand the issues you might be facing and their expert help will support you in coping with pancreatic cancer.

Call free on **0808 801 0707** weekdays 10am-4pm,
or email **nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk**

We're here with the information you need

We have the most up-to-date information on everything you need to know about pancreatic cancer. We can help you every step of the way through diagnosis and treatment options to managing your symptoms and the care you receive.

Go to **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/informationandsupport**

Download or order our free publications at
pancreaticcancer.org.uk/publications or call **0808 801 0707**

Find an A-Z of medical words at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/medicalwords**

We're here so you can share

Our Forum is a supportive place where everyone affected by pancreatic cancer can be there for each other online, any time of day or night:

forum.pancreaticcancer.org.uk

Our Living with Pancreatic Cancer Support Days provide local face-to-face support in an informal setting for people with pancreatic cancer:

pancreaticcancer.org.uk/supportdays

Local support groups mean you can meet other people to share your experiences:

pancreaticcancer.org.uk/supportgroups

Useful organisations

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 (Everyday 8am-8pm)

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

Maggie's Centres

www.maggiescentres.org

Tel: 0300 123 1801

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

We would like to thank the following people who reviewed this information.

- Roopinder Gilmore, Consultant Medical Oncologist, Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust
- Rose Polcaro, Clinical Nurse Specialist Pancreas and Biliary Tract Cancers, Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust
- Ganesh Radhakrishna, Consultant Clinical Oncologist, The Christie Hospital, Manchester
- Pancreatic Cancer UK Lay Information Reviewers
- Pancreatic Cancer UK Specialist Nurses

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

6th Floor Westminster Tower
3 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7SP

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

© Pancreatic Cancer UK August 2019
Review date August 2021