

Head and neck squamous cell carcinoma recurrent or metastatic cARBOplatin fluorouracil and cetuximab

ID: 1204 v.7 Endorsed

This protocol was published over 10 years ago and has been assessed by the reference committee as suitable to be reviewed as required. The review due date has been removed. If something in this protocol requires reference committee consideration, please click on the feedback button at the bottom of the page.

Read more about the as required review process in this [factsheet](#).

⚠ ADDIKD Carboplatin dosing:

For dosing carboplatin, ADDIKD recommends that:

- Directly measured glomerular filtration rate (mGFR) is the preferred kidney function value in the Calvert formula, especially where estimated kidney function may be unreliable for accurate therapeutic dosing.
- Where mGFR is unavailable, eGFR adjusted to an individual's body surface area (BSA-adjusted eGFR) is a suitable alternative for use in the Calvert formula.
- Kidney function should not be capped at 125 mL/min for use in the Calvert formula.
- Recalculation of carboplatin doses at each cycle is unnecessary, except when baseline kidney function (e.g., eGFR) alters by > 20% or when there is a change in the clinical status of the patient.

For further information refer to the [eviQ Factsheet](#) around carboplatin dosing and the carboplatin drug monograph within the ADDIKD guideline. To assist with calculations, use the [eviQ Estimated Glomerular Filtration Rate \(eGFR\) and carboplatin dose calculators](#).

⚠ Fluoropyrimidine overdose or overexposure:

Fluoropyrimidine overdose or overexposure may result in severe or life-threatening toxicity. An antidote is available and is highly effective if given within 96 hours. Read more about [fluoropyrimidine overdose or overexposure](#).

Head and neck cancer treatment is complex and combined modality therapy is common; the involvement of a multidisciplinary team (MDT) in the initial development and ongoing evaluation of the treatment plan, and the management of the sequelae associated with treatment is recommended.

Check for clinical trials in this patient group. Link to [Australian Clinical Trials](#) website

The anticancer drug(s) in this protocol may have been included in the ADDIKD guideline. Dose recommendations in kidney dysfunction have yet to be updated to align with the ADDIKD guideline. Recommendations will be updated once the individual protocol has been evaluated by the reference committee. For further information refer to the ADDIKD guideline. To assist with calculations, use the [eviQ Estimated Glomerular Filtration Rate \(eGFR\) calculator](#).

International Consensus Guideline for Anticancer Drug Dosing in Kidney Dysfunction (ADIKD)

2022

[Click here](#)



Related pages:

- [Head and neck squamous cell carcinoma recurrent or metastatic cisPlatin fluorouracil and cetuximab](#)
- [Head and neck squamous cell carcinoma recurrent or metastatic cARBOplatin and fluorouracil](#)
- [Head and neck squamous cell carcinoma recurrent or metastatic methotrexate](#)

Treatment schedule - Overview

Cycle 1

Drug	Dose	Route	Day
Cetuximab	400 mg/m ²	IV infusion	1
cARBOplatin	5 AUC *	IV infusion	1
Fluorouracil	4,000 mg/m ² (equivalent to 1000 mg/m ² /day)	CIV	1
Cetuximab	250 mg/m ²	IV infusion	8 and 15

Cycle 2 and further cycles

Drug	Dose	Route	Day
Cetuximab	250 mg/m ²	IV infusion	1, 8, 15
cARBOplatin	5 AUC *	IV infusion	1
Fluorouracil	4,000 mg/m ² (equivalent to 1000 mg/m ² /day)	CIV	1

*if estimated GFR is 125 mL/min (i.e. AUC 5 dose > 750 mg), obtaining direct measurement rather than an estimated renal function and/or dose capping is strongly recommended

Frequency: 21 days

Cycles: up to 6 cycles in responding patients and consider maintenance cetuximab until disease progression or unacceptable toxicity

Drug status: Carboplatin and fluorouracil are on the [PBS general schedule](#)

Cetuximab :TGA registered but not PBS listed for this indication

Cost: ~ \$4,400

Treatment schedule - Detail

The supportive therapies (e.g. antiemetics, premedications, etc.), infusion times, diluents, volumes and routes of administration, if included, are listed as defaults. They may vary between institutions and can be substituted to reflect individual institutional policy.

*Antiemetics if included in the treatment schedule are based upon recommendations from national and international guidelines. These are **defaults only** and may be substituted to reflect individual institutional policy. [Select here for recommended doses of alternative antiemetics.](#)*

Cycle 1

Day 1		
Loratadine	10 mg (PO)	60 minutes before treatment
Dexamethasone	8 mg (PO)	60 minutes before treatment
Cetuximab	400 mg/m ² (IV infusion)	over 2 hours **
Netupitant	300 mg (PO)	60 minutes before chemotherapy (fixed dose preparation with palonosetron)
Palonosetron	0.5 mg (PO)	60 minutes before chemotherapy (fixed dose preparation with netupitant)
cARBOplatin	5 AUC (IV infusion)	in 500 mL glucose 5% over 30 to 60 minutes (if estimated GFR is 125 mL/min (i.e. AUC 5 dose > 750 mg), obtaining direct measurement rather than an estimated renal function and/or dose capping is strongly recommended)
Fluorouracil	4,000 mg/m ² (CIV)	via ambulatory infusion pump over 96 hours (equivalent to 1000 mg/m ² /day)

Day 2 and 3		
Dexamethasone	8 mg (PO)	ONCE a day (or in divided doses) with or after food. Note: dexamethasone doses on day 2 and 3 may not be required and may be reduced or omitted at the clinicians discretion *

Day 8 and 15		
Loratadine	10 mg (PO)	60 minutes before treatment
Dexamethasone	4 mg (PO)	60 minutes before treatment
Cetuximab	250 mg/m ² (IV infusion)	over 60 minutes

Cycle 2 and further cycles

Day 1		
Loratadine	10 mg (PO)	60 minutes before treatment
Dexamethasone	8 mg (PO)	60 minutes before treatment
Cetuximab	250 mg/m ² (IV infusion)	over 60 minutes
Netupitant	300 mg (PO)	60 minutes before chemotherapy (fixed dose preparation with palonosetron)
Palonosetron	0.5 mg (PO)	60 minutes before chemotherapy (fixed dose preparation with netupitant)
cARBOplatin	5 AUC (IV infusion)	in 500 mL glucose 5% over 30 to 60 minutes (if estimated GFR is 125 mL/min (i.e. AUC 5 dose > 750 mg), obtaining direct measurement rather than an estimated renal function and/or dose capping is strongly recommended)
Fluorouracil	4,000 mg/m ² (CIV)	via ambulatory infusion pump over 96 hours (equivalent to 1000 mg/m ² /day)

Day 2 and 3		
Dexamethasone	8 mg (PO)	ONCE a day (or in divided doses) with or after food. Note: dexamethasone doses on day 2 and 3 may not be required and may be reduced or omitted at the clinicians discretion *

Day 8 and 15		
Loratadine	10 mg (PO)	60 minutes before treatment
Dexamethasone	4 mg (PO)	60 minutes before treatment
Cetuximab	250 mg/m ² (IV infusion)	over 60 minutes

* [Link to ID 7 Prevention of antineoplastic induced nausea and vomiting](#)

**Although the product information recommends a maximum cetuximab infusion rate of 5 mg/min for the loading dose and 10 mg/min for subsequent doses, rates of 2 hours for the loading dose and 60 minutes for subsequent doses were used in clinical trials.¹

Frequency: 21 days

Cycles: up to 6 cycles in responding patients and consider maintenance cetuximab until disease progression or unacceptable toxicity

Indications and patient population

- Recurrent or metastatic head and neck squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) in reasonably fit patients with performance status 0 to 2, who cannot tolerate cisplatin

Clinical information

Safety alert fluoropyrimidines	<p>Fluoropyrimidines can be administered by different routes and schedules with each method having associated increased risk of certain side effects. Fluoropyrimidine overdose or overexposure is a rare but potentially life threatening side effect of this drug class and can occur by any route of administration. An antidote is available and highly effective if given within 96 hours.</p> <p>Read more about the medication safety alert for infusional fluorouracil and fluoropyrimidine overdose or overexposure</p>
Venous access	<p>Central venous access device (CVAD) is required to administer this treatment.</p> <p>Read more about central venous access device line selection</p>
Hypersensitivity/infusion related reaction	<p>High risk with cetuximab.</p> <p>High risk with carboplatin. Hypersensitivity risk increases with number of cycles of carboplatin. Rechallenge with carboplatin after hypersensitivity carries a high risk of anaphylaxis, and where clinically indicated, should be undertaken with a desensitisation protocol with appropriate supports in place. Refer to local institutional policy.</p> <p>Read more about Hypersensitivity reaction</p>
Premedication	<p>The product information states that premedication is required for this treatment.</p> <p>Please refer to the treatment schedule for suggested premedication regimen. This may be substituted to reflect institutional policy.</p>
Emetogenicity MODERATE	<p>Suggested default antiemetics have been added to the treatment schedule, and may be substituted to reflect institutional policy.</p> <p>A combination of an NK1 receptor antagonist, 5HT3, and a steroid is available on the PBS for the prevention of nausea and vomiting associated with all moderate to highly emetogenic anti-cancer therapies.</p> <p>A steroid has been included both as an antiemetic and premedication for hypersensitivity in this protocol.</p> <p>Ensure that patients also have sufficient antiemetics for breakthrough emesis:</p> <p>Metoclopramide 10 mg three times a day when necessary (maximum of 30 mg/24 hours, up to 5 days) OR</p> <p>Prochlorperazine 10 mg PO every 6 hours when necessary.</p> <p>Read more about preventing anti-cancer therapy induced nausea and vomiting</p>
Cardiac toxicity	<p>Cardiac toxicity is a serious complication that can occur during treatment with fluorouracil. Patients treated with fluorouracil, especially those with a prior history of cardiac disease or other risk factors, should be carefully monitored during therapy.</p> <p>Read more about cardiac toxicity associated with anti-cancer drugs</p>
Acneiform rash	<p>EGFR targeted therapies are commonly associated with acneiform rash. The rash may peak in the first 2 to 4 weeks.</p> <p>Ensure advice on skin care (i.e. moisturisers) and sunscreen is provided. Prophylactic or early therapy with a tetracycline antibiotic (e.g. doxycycline) and 1% hydrocortisone cream to affected areas may be considered. Patients developing skin rash should be monitored for infectious sequelae, dose reductions and/or delay or cessation of treatment may be required.</p> <p>Read more about acneiform rash associated with EGFR inhibitors</p>
Diarrhoea	<p>Antidiarrhoeals (e.g. loperamide) are usually prescribed with this treatment.</p> <p>Read more about treatment induced diarrhoea</p>

Dihydropyrimidine dehydrogenase (DPD) enzyme deficiency	Rare, life-threatening toxicities such as mucositis, neutropenia, neurotoxicity and diarrhoea have been reported following administration of fluoropyrimidines (e.g. fluorouracil and capecitabine). Severe unexplained toxicities require investigation prior to continuing with treatment. Testing for DPD enzyme deficiency is available in Australia but not currently reimbursed. Read more about dihydropyrimidine dehydrogenase (DPD) enzyme deficiency
Nutrition risk HIGH	All patients should be assessed by a dietitian prior to commencement of treatment. Read more about COSA's evidence-based practice guidelines for the nutritional management of adult patients with head and neck cancer
Pulmonary toxicity	Interstitial lung disease (ILD) has been reported in patients treated with EGFR inhibitors. Read more about pulmonary toxicity associated with anti-cancer drugs .
Speech pathology	All head and neck patients presenting with either a swallowing and /or communication problem should be referred
Blood tests	FBC, EUC, eGFR and LFTs at baseline and prior to each cycle. Calcium and magnesium at baseline and as clinically indicated. Recalculation of carboplatin doses at each cycle is unnecessary, except when baseline kidney function (e.g., eGFR) alters by greater than 20% or when there is a change in the clinical status of the patient. Magnesium wasting syndrome is associated with this therapy and patients should be monitored for hypomagnesaemia and accompanying hypocalcaemia for up to 8 weeks after completion of treatment.
Hepatitis B screening and prophylaxis	Routine screening for HBsAg and anti-HBc is NOT usually recommended for patients receiving this treatment. Read more about hepatitis B screening and prophylaxis in cancer patients requiring cytotoxic and/or immunosuppressive therapy
Vaccinations	Live vaccines are contraindicated in cancer patients receiving immunosuppressive therapy and/or who have poorly controlled malignant disease. Refer to the recommended schedule of vaccination for immunocompromised patients, as outlined in the Australian Immunisation Handbook . Read more about COVID-19 vaccines and cancer .
Fertility, pregnancy and lactation	Cancer treatment can have harmful effects on fertility and this should be discussed with all patients of reproductive potential prior to commencing treatment. There is a risk of foetal harm in pregnant women. A pregnancy test should be considered prior to initiating treatment in females of reproductive potential if sexually active. It is important that all patients of reproductive potential use effective contraception whilst on therapy and after treatment finishes. Effective contraception methods and adequate contraception timeframe should be discussed with all patients of reproductive potential. Possibility of infant risk should be discussed with breastfeeding patients. Read more about the effect of cancer treatment on fertility

Dose modifications

Evidence for dose modifications is limited, and the recommendations made on eviQ are intended as a guide only. They are generally conservative with an emphasis on safety. Any dose modification should be based on clinical judgement, and the individual patient's situation including but not limited to treatment intent (curative vs palliative), the anti-cancer regimen (single versus combination therapy versus chemotherapy versus immunotherapy), biology of the cancer (site, size, mutations, metastases), other treatment related side effects, additional co-morbidities, performance status and patient preferences. Suggested dose modifications are based on clinical trial findings, product information, published guidelines and reference committee consensus. The dose reduction applies to each individual dose and not to the total number of days or duration of treatment cycle unless stated otherwise. Non-haematological gradings are based on [Common Terminology Criteria for Adverse Events \(CTCAE\)](#) unless otherwise specified. Renal and hepatic dose modifications have been standardised where possible. For more information see dosing considerations & disclaimer.

The dose recommendations in kidney dysfunction (i.e.renal impairment) displayed may not reflect those in the ADDIKD guideline and have been included for historical reference only. Recommendations will be updated once the individual protocol

has been evaluated by the reference committee, with this version of the protocol then being archived. Clinicians are expected to refer to the ADDIKD guideline prior to prescribing in kidney dysfunction.

International Consensus Guideline for Anticancer Drug Dosing in Kidney Dysfunction (ADDIKD).

For dosing carboplatin, ADDIKD recommends that:

- Directly measured glomerular filtration rate (mGFR) is the preferred kidney function value in the Calvert formula, especially where estimated kidney function may be unreliable for accurate therapeutic dosing.
- Where mGFR is unavailable, eGFR adjusted to an individual's body surface area (BSA-adjusted eGFR) is a suitable alternative for use in the Calvert formula.
- Kidney function should not be capped at 125 mL/min for use in the Calvert formula.
- Recalculation of carboplatin doses at each cycle is unnecessary, except when baseline kidney function (e.g., eGFR) alters by > 20% or when there is a change in the clinical status of the patient.

For further information refer the [eviQ Factsheet](#) around carboplatin dosing and the carboplatin drug monograph within the ADDIKD guideline. To assist with calculations, use the eviQ [Estimated Glomerular Filtration Rate \(eGFR\)](#) and [carboplatin dose calculators](#).

Note:

- All dose reductions are calculated as a percentage of the starting dose.

Haematological toxicity	
ANC x 10⁹/L (pre-treatment blood test)	
1.0 to less than 1.5	Refer to local institutional guidelines; it is the view of the expert clinicians that treatment should continue if patient is clinically well.
0.5 to less than 1.0	Delay treatment until recovery
less than 0.5	Delay treatment until recovery and consider reducing carboplatin and fluorouracil by 25% for subsequent cycles
Febrile neutropenia	Delay treatment until recovery and consider reducing carboplatin and fluorouracil by 25% for subsequent cycles
Platelets x 10⁹/L (pre-treatment blood test)	
75 to less than 100	The general recommendation is to delay, however if the patient is clinically well it may be appropriate to continue treatment; refer to treating team and/or local institutional guidelines.
50 to less than 75	Delay treatment until recovery
less than 50	Delay treatment until recovery and consider reducing carboplatin and fluorouracil by 25% for subsequent cycles

Renal impairment	
Creatinine clearance (mL/min)	
30 to 50	Reduce fluorouracil by 25% and recalculate carboplatin dose using Calvert formula
less than 30	Reduce fluorouracil by 50% and recalculate carboplatin dose using Calvert formula based on measured glomerular filtration rate (GFR) or consider omitting

Hepatic impairment	
Hepatic dysfunction	
Mild	No dose modifications necessary
Moderate	Reduce fluorouracil by 25%
Severe	Reduce fluorouracil by 50%

Mucositis and stomatitis	
Grade 2	Delay treatment until toxicity has resolved to Grade 1 or less and reduce the dose for

Mucositis and stomatitis	
	subsequent cycles as follows: 1 st occurrence: No dose reduction 2 nd occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil by 25% 3 rd occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil by 50% 4 th occurrence: Omit fluorouracil
Grade 3 or Grade 4	Delay treatment until toxicity has resolved to Grade 1 or less and reduce the dose for subsequent cycles as follows: 1 st occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil by 50% 2 nd occurrence: Omit fluorouracil

Diarrhoea	
Grade 2	Delay treatment until toxicity has resolved to Grade 1 or less and reduce doses for subsequent cycles as follows: 1 st occurrence: No dose reduction 2 nd occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil and cetuximab by 25% 3 rd occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil and cetuximab by 50% 4 th occurrence: Omit fluorouracil and cetuximab
Grade 3 or Grade 4	Delay treatment until toxicity has resolved to Grade 1 or less and reduce doses for subsequent cycles as follows: 1 st occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil and cetuximab by 50% 2 nd occurrence: Omit fluorouracil and cetuximab

Hand foot syndrome (link to Hand foot syndrome (Palmar-plantar erythrodysesthesia))	
Grade 2	Delay treatment until toxicity has resolved to Grade 1 or less and reduce the dose for subsequent cycles as follows: 1 st occurrence: No dose reduction 2 nd occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil by 25% 3 rd occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil by 50% 4 th occurrence: Omit fluorouracil
Grade 3	Delay treatment until toxicity has resolved to Grade 1 or less and reduce the dose for subsequent cycles as follows: 1 st occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil by 50% 2 nd occurrence: Omit fluorouracil

Rash acneiform	
Grade 3	Delay treatment until toxicity has resolved to Grade 2 or less and reduce the dose for subsequent cycles as follows: 1 st occurrence: No dose reduction 2 nd occurrence: Reduce cetuximab to 200 mg/m ² 3 rd occurrence: Reduce cetuximab to 150 mg/m ² 4 th occurrence: Omit cetuximab

Interactions

The drug interactions shown below are not an exhaustive list. For a more comprehensive list and for detailed information on specific drug interactions and clinical management, please refer to the specific drug product information and the following key resources:

- [MIMS - interactions tab](#) (includes link to a CYP-450 table) (login required)
- [Australian Medicines Handbook \(AMH\) – interactions tab](#) (login required)
- [Micromedex Drug Interactions](#) (login required)
- [Cancer Drug Interactions](#)
- [Cytochrome P450 Drug Interactions](#)

For more information see [References & Disclaimer](#).

Carboplatin		
	Interaction	Clinical management
Nephrotoxic drugs (e.g. aminoglycosides, amphotericin, contrast dye, frusemide, NSAIDs)	Additive nephrotoxicity	Avoid combination or monitor kidney function closely
Ototoxic drugs (e.g. aminoglycosides, frusemide, NSAIDs)	Additive ototoxicity	Avoid combination or perform regular audiometric testing
Paclitaxel	Administration schedule may influence the development of myelosuppression	Minimise toxicity by administering paclitaxel first in regimens using the combination

Cetuximab		
	Interaction	Clinical management
Chemotherapeutic agents	Increased incidence of specific adverse reactions when used in combination	Monitor closely (e.g. for cardiac toxicity and hand-foot syndrome when combined with fluoropyrimidines; for severe diarrhoea with capecitabine and oxaliplatin)

Fluorouracil		
	Interaction	Clinical management
Folic acid	Increased toxicity of fluorouracil due to stabilisation of its bond to thymidylate synthetase (folic acid is a precursor of folinic acid/leucovorin)	Advise patients not to take folic acid supplements (inc. multivitamins) around the time of receiving treatment with fluorouracil
Metronidazole, tinidazole	Increased toxicity of fluorouracil due to reduced clearance	Avoid combination or monitor for fluorouracil toxicity
Warfarin and other drugs metabolised by CYP2C9 (e.g. warfarin, phenytoin etc.)	Increased effect/toxicity of these drugs due to inhibition of CYP2C9 by fluorouracil resulting in reduced clearance	Avoid combination or monitor for increased effect/toxicity of these drugs (e.g. for bleeding/elevated INR with warfarin, elevated phenytoin serum levels or signs of toxicity such as ataxia, tremor etc.)
Allopurinol	Reduced efficacy of fluorouracil possible due to reduced conversion to the active metabolites	Avoid combination or monitor for reduced fluorouracil efficacy

NK-1 antagonist e.g. aprepitant, fosaprepitant, netupitant		
	Interaction	Clinical management
Dexamethasone	Increased effects/toxicity of dexamethasone due to inhibition of its metabolism via CYP3A4	Reduce dose of antiemetic dexamethasone by approximately 50% when adding a NK-1 antagonist. For protocols that already recommend a NK-1 antagonist, the dose reduction of antiemetic dexamethasone has already been taken into account. If dexamethasone is part of the chemotherapy protocol , dose reduction as per the product information is not routinely recommended in clinical practice and no additional dexamethasone is required for antiemetic cover.
Warfarin	Reduced anticoagulant efficacy of warfarin due to increased clearance (aprepitant induces CYP2C9). *Note interaction only applicable to aprepitant/ fosaprepitant	INR should be monitored in the 2 week period, particularly at 7 to 10 days following the administration of aprepitant/ fosaprepitant
Combined oral contraceptive	Reduced contraceptive efficacy due to increased clearance. *Note interaction only applicable to aprepitant/ fosaprepitant	Alternative non-hormonal methods should be used during and for 1 month after stopping aprepitant/ fosaprepitant
CYP3A4 inducers (e.g. carbamazepine, phenytoin, phenobarbitone, rifampicin, St John's wort etc.)	Reduced efficacy of NK-1 antagonist possible due to increased clearance	Avoid combination or monitor for decreased antiemetic effect. Consider using an alternative antiemetic regimen
CYP3A4 inhibitors (e.g. azole antifungals, clarithromycin, erythromycin, grapefruit juice, ritonavir etc.)	Increased toxicity of NK-1 antagonist possible due to reduced clearance	Avoid combination or monitor for increased adverse effects of NK-1 antagonist (e.g. headache, hiccups, constipation)
Drugs metabolised by CYP3A4 (e.g. etoposide, imatinib, irinotecan, midazolam, paclitaxel, vinblastine, vincristine etc.)	Increased effects/toxicity of these drugs possible due to inhibition of CYP3A4 by NK-1 antagonist	Avoid combination or monitor for increased toxicity especially with orally administered drugs

General		
	Interaction	Clinical management
Warfarin	Anti-cancer drugs may alter the anticoagulant effect of warfarin.	Monitor INR regularly and adjust warfarin dosage as appropriate; consider alternative anticoagulant.
Direct oral anticoagulants (DOACs) e.g. apixaban, rivaroxaban, dabigatran	Interaction with both CYP3A4 and P-gp inhibitors /inducers. DOAC and anti-cancer drug levels may both be altered, possibly leading to loss of efficacy or toxicity (i.e. increased bleeding).	Apixaban: avoid concurrent use with strong CYP3A4 and P-gp inhibitors. If treating VTE, avoid use with strong CYP3A4 and P-gp inducers. Rivaroxaban: avoid concurrent use with strong CYP3A4 and P-gp inhibitors. Dabigatran: avoid combination with strong P-gp inducers and inhibitors. If concurrent use is unavoidable, monitor closely for efficacy/toxicity of both drugs.
Digoxin	Anti-cancer drugs can damage the lining of the intestine; affecting the absorption of digoxin.	Monitor digoxin serum levels; adjust digoxin dosage as appropriate.
Antiepileptics	Both altered antiepileptic and anti-cancer drug levels may occur, possibly leading to loss of efficacy or toxicity.	Where concurrent use of an enzyme-inducing antiepileptic cannot be avoided, monitor antiepileptic serum levels for toxicity, as well as seizure frequency for efficacy; adjust dosage as appropriate. Also monitor closely for efficacy of the anti-cancer therapy.
Antiplatelet agents and NSAIDs	Increased risk of bleeding due to treatment related thrombocytopenia.	Avoid or minimise combination. If combination deemed essential, (e.g. low dose aspirin for ischaemic heart disease) monitor for signs of bleeding.
Serotonergic drugs, including selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs e.g. paroxetine) and serotonin noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs e.g. venlafaxine)	Increased risk of serotonin syndrome with concurrent use of 5-HT3 receptor antagonists (e.g. palonosetron, ondansetron, granisetron, tropisetron, dolasetron, etc.)	Avoid combination. If combination is clinically warranted, monitor for signs and symptoms of serotonin syndrome (e.g. confusion, agitation, tachycardia, hyperreflexia). For more information link to TGA Medicines Safety Update
Vaccines	Diminished response to vaccines and increased risk of infection with live vaccines.	Live vaccines (e.g. BCG, MMR, zoster and varicella) are contraindicated in patients on immunosuppressive therapy. Use with caution in patients on non-immunosuppressive therapy. For more information; refer to the recommended schedule of vaccination for cancer patients, as outlined in the Australian Immunisation Handbook

Administration

eviQ provides safe and effective instructions on how to administer cancer treatments. However, eviQ does not provide every treatment delivery option, and is unable to provide a comprehensive list of cancer treatment agents and their required IV line giving set/filter. There may be alternative methods of treatment administration, and alternative supportive treatments that are also appropriate. Please refer to the individual

Day 1

Approximate treatment time: 3 to 4 hours

Safe handling and waste management

Safe administration

General patient assessment prior to each day of treatment.

Any toxicity grade 2 or greater may require dose reduction, delay or omission of treatment and review by medical officer before commencing treatment.

Prime IV line(s).

Access TIVAD or CVAD.

Pre treatment medication

Verify premedication taken or administer as prescribed.

⌚ Treatment - Time out

Cetuximab

- administer via IV infusion over 2 hours (loading dose only)
- if well tolerated subsequent doses over 60 minutes
- although the product information recommends a maximum cetuximab infusion rate of 5 mg/min for the loading dose and 10 mg/min for subsequent doses, rates of 2 hours for the loading dose and 60 minutes for subsequent doses were used in clinical trials
- observe for hypersensitivity reaction
- flush with ~ 50 mL of sodium chloride 0.9%
- patient should be observed for an hour post infusion. If patient has a hypersensitivity reaction – stop infusion immediately. Review by medical officer; if re-challenge indicated, pre medicate patient and recommence infusion over 2 hours, then patient should be observed for an hour post infusion.

The product information recommends waiting one hour post completion of the cetuximab infusion, before commencing concomitant chemotherapy. However, to reflect clinical practice, if no reactions are observed with the first two doses, concomitant chemotherapy may be administered immediately following cetuximab at the discretion of the treating physician.

Pre treatment medication

Verify antiemetics taken or administer as prescribed.

⌚ Chemotherapy - Time out

Carboplatin

Administer carboplatin (irritant):

- via IV infusion over 30 to 60 minutes
- observe for hypersensitivity reactions
- flush with ~100 mL of sodium chloride 0.9%
- hypersensitivity risk increases with number of cycles administered.

Stop infusion at first sign of reaction:

- if symptoms are mild and resolve when infusion is stopped, consider recommencing infusion after review by medical officer at a slower rate
- for severe reactions seek medical assistance immediately and do not restart infusion.

Fluorouracil continuous infusion (irritant)

Connect pump containing fluorouracil and administer over the correct time for the amount of drug in the pump:

- **▲ safety alert** issued for administration of infusional fluorouracil

- verify the correct rate of infusion via the ambulatory infusion pump
- read more information about the different [ambulatory infusion pumps](#).

Continue [safe handling](#) precautions until 7 days after completion of drug(s)

Day 5

Approximate treatment time: 30 minutes

[Safe handling and waste management](#)

Disconnection of ambulatory infusion pump/infusor

Verify the ambulatory infusion pump/infusor is complete.

Disconnect the ambulatory infusion pump/infusor as per recommended procedure for type of pump/infusor.

Read more about [ambulatory infusion pumps/infusors](#).

Deaccess [TIVAD](#) or [CVAD](#).

Continue [safe handling](#) precautions until 7 days after completion of drug(s)

Day 8 and 15

Approximate treatment time: 2 hours

[Handling of monoclonal antibodies and waste management](#)

[Safe administration](#)

[General patient assessment](#) prior to each day of treatment.

Any toxicity grade 2 or greater may require dose reduction, delay or omission of treatment and review by medical officer before commencing treatment.

Prime IV line(s).

Access [TIVAD](#) or [CVAD](#).

Pre treatment medication

Verify premedication taken or administer as prescribed.

🕒 Treatment - Time out

Cetuximab

- administer via IV infusion
- if first dose was well tolerated, administer over 60 minutes
- although the product information recommends a maximum cetuximab infusion rate of 5 mg/min for the loading dose and 10 mg/min for subsequent doses, rates of 2 hours for the loading dose and 60 minutes for subsequent doses were used in clinical trials
- flush with ~ 50 mL of sodium chloride 0.9%
- observe for hypersensitivity reaction
- If patient has a hypersensitivity reaction – stop infusion immediately. Review by medical officer; if re-challenge indicated, pre medicate patient and recommence infusion over 2 hours, then patient should be observed for an hour post infusion.

Deaccess [TIVAD](#) or [CVAD](#).

Discharge Information

Antiemetics

- Antiemetics as prescribed.

Antidiarrhoeals

- Antidiarrhoeals as prescribed.

Patient information

- Ensure patient receives patient information sheet.

Infusion pumps

- CADD-Legacy® 1 ambulatory infusion pump [patient information sheet](#).
- CADD-Legacy® Plus ambulatory infusion pump [patient information sheet](#).
- CADD® Solis VIP ambulatory infusion pump [patient information sheet](#).
- Elastomeric infusion system [patient information sheet](#).

Side effects

The side effects listed below are not a complete list of all possible side effects for this treatment. Side effects are categorised into the approximate onset of presentation and should only be used as a guide.

Immediate (onset hours to days)

Hypersensitivity reaction	Anaphylaxis and infusion related reactions can occur with this treatment. Read more about hypersensitivity reaction
Nausea and vomiting	Read more about prevention of treatment induced nausea and vomiting
Taste and smell alteration	Read more about taste and smell changes
Cardiotoxicity	Coronary artery spasm is a temporary, sudden narrowing of one of the coronary arteries that may present at any time during treatment with fluoropyrimidines. It most commonly manifests as angina.

Early (onset days to weeks)	
Neutropenia	Abnormally low levels of neutrophils in the blood. This increases the risk of infection. Any fever or suspicion of infection should be investigated immediately and managed aggressively. Read more about immediate management of neutropenic fever
Thrombocytopenia	A reduction in the normal levels of functional platelets, increasing the risk of abnormal bleeding. Read more about thrombocytopenia
Oral mucositis	Erythematous and ulcerative lesions of the gastrointestinal tract (GIT). It commonly develops following chemotherapy, radiation therapy to the head, neck or oesophagus, and high dose chemotherapy followed by a blood and marrow transplant (BMT). Read more about oral mucositis
Diarrhoea	Read more about treatment induced diarrhoea
Anorexia	Loss of appetite accompanied by decreased food intake. Read more about anorexia
Fatigue	Read more about fatigue
Ocular changes	Symptoms may include eye pain, blurred vision, blepharitis, uveitis, optic neuritis, tear duct stenosis, conjunctivitis, hyperlacrimation, watery or dry eyes and photophobia.
Actinic keratoses flare	Pre-existing actinic keratoses (AKs) can become more inflamed and scaly as a result of immunosuppression. Read more about actinic keratoses flare
Acneiform rash	A skin rash, characterised by papules and pustules affecting the face and upper body. This is commonly associated with small molecule EGFR inhibitors and some monoclonal antibodies (e.g. cetuximab, panitumumab). Read more about acneiform rash associated with EGFR inhibitors
Photosensitivity	Increased sensitivity to ultraviolet (UV) light resulting in an exaggerated sunburn-like reaction accompanied by stinging sensations and urticaria.
Hypomagnesaemia, hypokalaemia, hypocalcaemia	Abnormally low levels of magnesium, potassium and calcium in the blood.
Palmar-plantar erythrodysesthesia (PPE) - hand-foot syndrome (HFS)	Bilateral erythema, tenderness, pain, swelling, tingling, numbness, pruritus, dry rash, or moist desquamation and ulceration of the palms and soles. It is also known as hand-foot syndrome (HFS). Symptoms appear to be dose dependent and palms are affected more than soles. Read more about hand-foot syndrome associated with chemotherapy

Late (onset weeks to months)	
Anaemia	Abnormally low levels of red blood cells (RBCs) or haemoglobin in the blood. Read more about anaemia
Hyperpigmentation	Darkening of an area of skin caused by the overproduction of melanin.
Abnormal hair growth	Hair may become fine, brittle and curly. Eyelashes and eyebrows may grow more quickly and become unusually long.
Paronychia	An inflammatory reaction involving the folds of the skin surrounding the fingernail. Read about nail toxicities
Pulmonary toxicity	Pulmonary toxicity may include damage to the lungs, airways, pleura and pulmonary circulation. Read more about pulmonary toxicity associated with anti-cancer drugs

Evidence

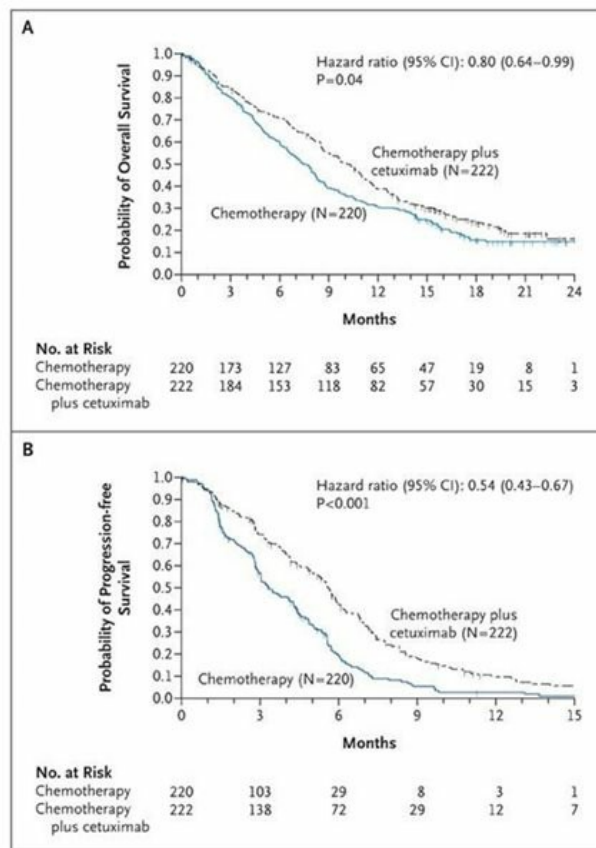
The evidence for the use of this protocol comes from a randomised phase III trial reported by Vermorken et al.¹ Between December 2004 and December 2005, 220 patients were randomised to receive cisplatin 100 mg/m² (or carboplatin AUC 5) plus fluorouracil 1000 mg/m²/day for 4 days every 3 weeks for a maximum of 6 cycles and 222 patients were randomised to receive the same chemotherapy plus weekly cetuximab at a dose of 400 mg/m² (loading dose) followed by 250 mg/m² for a maximum of 6 cycles. Patients with stable disease who received chemotherapy plus cetuximab continued to receive cetuximab until disease progression or unacceptable toxicity.

The primary end point was overall survival and secondary end points were progression-free survival, the best overall response, disease control, the time to treatment failure, the duration of the response and safety.¹

Efficacy

After a median follow up of 19.1 months in the cetuximab group and 18.2 months in the chemotherapy-alone group, the median overall survival was 10.1 months in the cetuximab group and 7.4 months in the chemotherapy-alone group (HR=0.8; 95% CI 0.64 to 0.99; p=0.04). The median progression-free survival was 5.6 months in the cetuximab group and 3.3 months in the chemotherapy-alone group (HR=0.54; 95% CI 0.43 to 0.67; p<0.001).¹

Kaplan-Meier estimates of overall survival and progression-free survival¹



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Responses to treatment and survival¹

Table 2. Responses to Treatment and Survival.*

Variable	Cetuximab plus Platinum–Fluorouracil (N = 222)	Platinum–Fluorouracil Alone (N = 220)	Hazard Ratio or Odds Ratio (95% CI)	P Value
Survival — mo †				
Overall	10.1 (8.6–11.2)	7.4 (6.4–8.3)	Hazard ratio, 0.80 (0.64–0.99)	0.04 ‡
Progression-free	5.6 (5.0–6.0)	3.3 (2.9–4.3)	Hazard ratio, 0.54 (0.43–0.67)	<0.001 ‡
Best response to therapy — %				
Overall	36 (29–42)	20 (15–25)	Odds ratio, 2.33 (1.50–3.60)	<0.001 §
Disease control ¶	81 (75–86)	60.0 (53–67)	Odds ratio, 2.88 (1.87–4.44)	<0.001 §
Time to treatment failure — mo †	4.8 (4.0–5.6)	3.0 (2.8–3.4)	Hazard ratio, 0.59 (0.48–0.73)	<0.001 ‡
Duration of response — mo †	5.6 (4.7–6.0)	4.7 (3.6–5.9)	Hazard ratio, 0.76 (0.50–1.17)	0.21 ‡

* Data in the treatment columns are median (95% CI). The P values, hazard ratios, and odds ratios are stratified according to receipt or non-receipt of previous chemotherapy and the Karnofsky performance score at randomization.

† The number of months was estimated with the use of the Kaplan–Meier method.

‡ The P value was calculated with the use of the log-rank test.

§ The P value was calculated with the use of the Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel test.

¶ Disease control includes complete response, partial response, and stable disease. Time to treatment failure was defined as the time from randomization until the first occurrence of one of the following events: disease progression as assessed by the investigator, discontinuation of treatment because of disease progression, discontinuation of treatment because of an adverse event, initiation of any new anticancer therapy, or withdrawal of consent or death within 60 days after the final tumor assessment or randomization.

† Data on the duration of response were available for 62 patients in the cetuximab group and 36 patients in the chemotherapy-alone group; data on disease progression in these patients were available at the time of the analysis. The number of months was estimated with the use of the Kaplan–Meier method.

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Toxicity

In general, the adverse-event profile was not affected by the addition of cetuximab with the exception of sepsis ($p=0.02$) and hypomagnesemia ($p=0.05$). Grade 3 skin reactions were seen in 9% of the patients who received cetuximab and there were six grade 3/4 infusion-related reactions among patients receiving cetuximab. 10 deaths (3 in the cetuximab group and 7 in the chemotherapy-alone group) were considered to be treatment-related.¹

Toxicity¹

Table 3. Grade 3 or 4 Adverse Events in the Safety Population.*

Event	Cetuximab plus Platinum–Fluorouracil (N=219)		Platinum–Fluorouracil Alone (N=215)		P Value†
	Grade 3 or 4	Grade 4	Grade 3 or 4	Grade 4	
	<i>number of patients (%)</i>				
Any event	179 (82)	67 (31)	164 (76)	66 (31)	0.19
Neutropenia	49 (22)	9 (4)	50 (23)	18 (8)	0.91
Anemia	29 (13)	2 (1)	41 (19)	2 (1)	0.12
Thrombocytopenia	24 (11)	0	24 (11)	3 (1)	1.00
Leukopenia	19 (9)	4 (2)	19 (9)	5 (2)	1.00
Skin reactions‡	20 (9)	0	1 (<1)	0	<0.001
Hypokalemia	16 (7)	2 (1)	10 (5)	1 (<1)	0.31
Cardiac events§	16 (7)	11 (5)	9 (4)	7 (3)	0.22
Vomiting	12 (5)	0	6 (3)	0	0.23
Asthenia	11 (5)	1 (<1)	12 (6)	1 (<1)	0.83
Anorexia	11 (5)	2 (1)	3 (1)	1 (<1)	0.05
Hypomagnesemia	11 (5)	8 (4)	3 (1)	1 (<1)	0.05
Febrile neutropenia	10 (5)	2 (1)	10 (5)	4 (2)	1.00
Dyspnea	9 (4)	2 (1)	17 (8)	5 (2)	0.11
Pneumonia	9 (4)	3 (1)	4 (2)	1 (<1)	0.26
Hypocalcemia	9 (4)	5 (2)	2 (1)	0	0.06
Sepsis (including septic shock)	9 (4)	6 (3)	1 (<1)	1 (<1)	0.02
Tumor hemorrhage	3 (1)	2 (1)	6 (3)	4 (2)	0.33
Decreased performance status	2 (1)	1 (<1)	4 (2)	4 (2)	0.45
Respiratory failure	1 (<1)	0	5 (2)	4 (2)	0.12

* Grade 3 or 4 adverse events are listed if they were reported in 5% or more of patients in either treatment group, and grade 4 adverse events are listed if they were reported in 1% or more of patients in either group.

† The P values are for the differences between the treatment groups for grades 3 and 4 combined.

‡ Skin reactions were coded with the use of preferred terms from the *Medical Dictionary for Regulatory Activities*. These terms include acne pustular, acne, cellulitis, dermatitis acneiform, dry skin, erysipelas, erythema, face edema, folliculitis, growth of eyelashes, hair growth abnormal, hypertrichosis, nail-bed infection, nail-bed inflammation, nail disorder, nail infection, paronychia, pruritus, rash erythematous, rash follicular, rash generalized, rash macular, rash maculopapular, rash papular, rash pruritic, rash pustular, rash, skin exfoliation, skin hyperpigmentation, skin necrosis, staphylococcal scalded skin syndrome, telangiectasia, wound necrosis, and xerosis. Grade 2 skin reactions were observed in 70 patients receiving platinum–fluorouracil plus cetuximab and in 6 patients receiving platinum–fluorouracil alone.

§ “Cardiac events” was a special adverse-event category comprising five medical conditions: arrest, arrhythmia, congestive heart failure, ischemia or infarction, and sudden death. The main grade 3 or 4 cardiac events in this study for patients receiving platinum–fluorouracil plus cetuximab and those receiving platinum–fluorouracil alone were congestive heart failure (four patients and one patient, respectively), infarction and ischemia (seven patients and two patients), and sudden death (three patients and one patient).

© N Engl J Med 2008

References

- 1 Vermorken, J. B., R. Mesia, F. Rivera, et al. 2008. "Platinum-based chemotherapy plus cetuximab in head and neck cancer." *N Engl J Med* 359(11):1116-1127.

History

Version 7

Date	Summary of changes
31/01/2024	Protocol assessed by eviQ medical oncology reference committee and deemed suitable to be reviewed as required. Flag added, review date removed and version number increased to V.7. Read more about as required review protocol status in this factsheet .

Version 6

Date	Summary of changes
04/12/2020	Cetuximab infusion rate information in detailed treatment schedule and administration section updated to include maximum infusion rates as per product information. Version number increased to V.6.

Version 5

Date	Summary of changes
04/12/2020	Cetuximab hypersensitivity/infusion related reaction clinical information updated to include risk factors as per Medical Oncology Reference Committee meeting 23 rd October 2020. Version number increased to V.5.

Version 4

Date	Summary of changes
29/07/2011	New protocol taken to Medical Oncology Reference Committee meeting.
10/11/2011	Approved and published on eviQ.
10/04/2012	PHC OMIS view added.
11/04/2012	Post cetuximab chemotherapy waiting time changed as per discussion at Medical Oncology Reference Committee. Although the PI states waiting one hour post infusion before commencing subsequent chemotherapy, the consensus was that in clinical practice this is not necessary after the first 2 doses and should be at the discretion of the treating physician.
01/05/2012	Palonosetron added as the preferred 5HT ₃ antagonist for moderate emetogenicity.
01/06/2012	PHC CVAD Pre clin added. PHC OMIS view published.
03/05/2013	Protocol Reviewed at Medical Oncology Reference Committee meeting. Next review in 2 years.
20/08/2014	PHC view removed.
09/03/2015	Carboplatin dosing - for estimated GFR > 125 mL/min, note about measuring GFR and/or dose capping added.
19/06/2015	Reviewed electronically by Medical Oncology Reference Committee. No changes. Review 2 years.
16/10/2016	Patient information sheet updated to include more fluorouracil toxicity symptom warnings.
21/10/2016	Protocol reviewed by Medical Oncology Reference Committee. No change. Review 2 years.
31/05/2017	Transferred to new eviQ website. Version number changed to V.2. Hepatitis B screening changed to NOT recommended. Antiemetic change: A NK1 receptor antagonist and a 5HT ₃ receptor antagonist in combination with dexamethasone has been added as available on the PBS for primary prophylaxis of carboplatin induced nausea and vomiting.
10/05/2018	Haematological dose modifications updated as per consensus of the expert clinician group. Fluoropyrimidine overdose warning added. DPD enzyme deficiency wording in clinical information updated. Fluoropyrimidine safety alert wording in clinical information updated. Version changed to number V.3.
17/01/2019	Carboplatin AUC ≥ 4 changed from highly to moderately emetogenic as per MASCC/ESMO and ASCO guidelines and medical oncology reference committee consensus. Dexamethasone day 4 dose removed. NK1 receptor antagonist unchanged. Treatment detail and clinical information updated to reflect the change. Version number changed to V.4
15/03/2019	Protocol reviewed by Medical Oncology Reference Committee. No changes. Review 5 years.

The information contained in this protocol is based on the highest level of available evidence and consensus of the eviQ reference committee regarding their views of currently accepted approaches to treatment. Any clinician (medical oncologist, haematologist, radiation oncologist, medical physicist, radiation therapist, pharmacist or nurse) seeking to apply or consult this protocol is expected to use independent clinical judgement in the context of individual clinical circumstances to determine any patient's care or treatment. While eviQ endeavours to link to reliable sources that provide accurate information, eviQ and the Cancer Institute NSW do not endorse or accept responsibility for the accuracy, currency, reliability or correctness of the content of linked external information sources. Use is subject to eviQ's disclaimer available at www.eviQ.org.au

First approved: 10 November 2011

Last reviewed: 15 March 2019

Review due: As required

The currency of this information is guaranteed only up until the date of printing, for any updates please check:

<https://www.eviq.org.au/p/1204>

08 Mar 2024

Patient information - Head and neck cancer recurrent or metastatic - Carboplatin, fluorouracil and cetuximab

Patient's name:


Your treatment

The treatment schedule below explains how the drugs for this treatment are given.

Carboplatin, fluorouracil and cetuximab			
This treatment cycle is repeated every 21 days. Your doctor will advise you of the number of treatments you will have.			
Day	Treatment	How it is given	How long it takes
1	Cetuximab <i>(se-TUK-see-mab)</i> Carboplatin <i>(carb-o-PLAT-in)</i>	By a drip into a vein	About 3 to 4 hours
1 to 4	Fluorouracil <i>(flure-oh-YOOR-a-sill)</i>	By a pump slowly into a vein	Continuous for 4 days (equal to 96 hours)
5	Disconnect pump		About 30 minutes
8 and 15	Cetuximab	By a drip into a vein	About 2 hours

When to get help

Anticancer drugs (drugs used to treat cancer) can sometimes cause serious problems. It is important to get medical help immediately if you become unwell.

	<p>IMMEDIATELY go to your nearest hospital Emergency Department, or contact your doctor or nurse if you have any of the following at any time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a temperature of 38°C or higher • chills, sweats, shivers or shakes • shortness of breath • uncontrolled vomiting or diarrhoea • pain, tingling or discomfort in your chest or arms • leaking from your pump • you become unwell. 	<p>Emergency contact details</p> <p>Ask your doctor or nurse from your treating team who to contact if you have a problem</p> <p>Daytime:.....</p> <p>Night/weekend:.....</p> <p>Other instructions:.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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During your treatment immediately tell the doctor or nurse looking after you if you get any of the following problems:

- leaking from the area where the drugs are being given
- pain, stinging, swelling or redness in the area where the drugs are being given or at any injection sites
- a skin rash, itching, feeling short of breath, wheezing, fever, shivers, or feeling dizzy or unwell in any way (allergic reaction).

Changes to your dose or treatment delays

Sometimes a treatment may be started at a lower dose or the dose needs to be changed during treatment. There may also be times when your treatment is delayed. This can happen if your doctor thinks you are likely to have severe side effects, if you get severe side effects, if your blood counts are affected and causing delays in treatment, or if you are finding it hard to cope with the treatment. This is called a dose reduction, dose change or treatment delay. Your doctor will explain if you need any changes or delays to your treatment and the reason why.

Blood tests and monitoring

Anti-cancer drugs can reduce the number of blood cells in your body. You will need to have regular blood tests to check that your blood cell count has returned to normal. If your blood count is low your treatment may be delayed until it has returned to normal. Your doctor or nurse will tell you when to have these blood tests. Tell your doctor if you are on an anticoagulant (medication used to treat or prevent blood clots) e.g. warfarin. You may need to have additional blood tests.

Pumps and central venous access devices (CVADs)

This treatment involves having chemotherapy through a pump. To have this, you will also need a central venous access device (CVAD). Your doctor or nurse will explain this to you. For more information see the [eviQ patient information sheets on pumps and CVADs](#). At home you will need to look at your pump 3 to 4 times a day to check it is working. Your nurse will teach you how to do this.

Other medications given during this treatment

- **Anti-sickness (anti-nausea) medication:** you may be given some anti-sickness medication. Make sure you take this medication as your doctor or nurse tells you, even if you don't feel sick. This can help to prevent the sickness starting.
- **Antidiarrhoeals:** you may be given some medication to treat diarrhoea. Your doctor or nurse will tell you how and when to take your antidiarrhoeal medication.
- **Medication for skin rash:** you may be given some medication (which may include a steroid cream, an antibiotic cream and/or oral antibiotics) to prevent or treat skin rash. Your doctor or nurse will tell you how to take or use these medications.
- **Cetuximab premedication:** before your treatment with cetuximab you will need to take some tablets called a premedication to help prevent you from having a reaction to the cetuximab.

Side effects

Cancer treatments can cause damage to normal cells in your body, which can cause side effects. Everyone gets different side effects, and some people will have more problems than others.

The table below shows some of the side effects you may get with this treatment. You are unlikely to get all of those listed and you may also get some side effects that have not been listed.

Tell your doctor or nurse about any side effects that worry you. Follow the instructions below and those given to you by your doctor or nurse.

Immediate (onset hours to days)

Allergic reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allergic reactions are uncommon but can be life threatening.• If you feel unwell during the infusion or shortly after it, or:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ get a fever, shivers or shakes◦ feel dizzy, faint, confused or anxious◦ start wheezing or have difficulty breathing◦ have a rash, itch or redness of the face <p><u>While you are in hospital:</u> Tell your doctor or nurse immediately.</p> <p><u>After you leave:</u> Contact your doctor or nurse immediately, or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department.</p>
Nausea and vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You may feel sick (nausea) or be sick (vomit).• Take your anti-sickness medication as directed even if you don't feel sick.• Drink plenty of fluids (unless you are fluid restricted).• Eat small meals more frequently.• Try food that does not require much preparation.• Try bland foods like dry biscuits or toast.• Gentle exercise may help with nausea.• Ask your doctor or nurse for eviQ patient information - Nausea and vomiting during cancer treatment.• Tell your doctor or nurse immediately, or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department if you have uncontrolled vomiting or feel dizzy or light-headed.
Taste and smell changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You may find that food loses its taste or tastes different.• These changes are likely to go away with time.• Do your mouth care regularly.• Chew on sugar-free gum or eat sugar-free mints.• Add flavour to your food with sauces and herbs.• Ask your doctor or nurse for eviQ patient information - Taste and smell changes during cancer treatment.
Heart problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You may get:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ chest pain or tightness◦ shortness of breath◦ an abnormal heartbeat• Tell your doctor if you have a history of heart problems or high blood pressure.• Tell your doctor or nurse immediately, or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department if you get any of the symptoms listed above.

Early (onset days to weeks)

<p>Infection risk (neutropenia)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This treatment lowers the amount of white blood cells in your body. The type of white blood cells that help to fight infection are called neutrophils. Having low level of neutrophils is called neutropenia. If you have neutropenia, you are at greater risk of getting an infection. It also means that your body can't fight infections as well as usual. This is a serious side effect, and can be life threatening. • Wash your hands often. • Keep a thermometer at home and take your temperature regularly, and if you feel unwell. • Do your mouth care regularly. • Inspect your central line site (if you have one) daily for any redness, pus or swelling. • Limit contact with people who are sick. • Learn how to recognise the signs of infection. • Ask your doctor or nurse for eviQ patient information - Infection during cancer treatment. • Tell your doctor or nurse immediately, or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department if you get any of the following signs or symptoms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ a temperature of 38°C or higher ◦ chills, shivers, sweats or shakes ◦ a sore throat or cough ◦ uncontrolled diarrhoea ◦ shortness of breath ◦ a fast heartbeat ◦ become unwell even without a temperature.
<p>Low platelets (thrombocytopenia)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This treatment lowers the amount of platelets in your blood. Platelets help your blood to clot. When they are low, you are at an increased risk of bleeding and bruising. • Try not to bruise or cut yourself. • Avoid contact sport or vigorous exercise. • Clear your nose by blowing gently. • Avoid constipation. • Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush. • Don't take aspirin, ibuprofen or other similar anti-inflammatory medications unless your doctor tells you to. • Tell your doctor or nurse if you have any bruising or bleeding. • Tell your doctor or nurse immediately, or go to your nearest hospital Emergency Department if you have any uncontrolled bleeding.
<p>Mouth pain and soreness (mucositis)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ bleeding gums ◦ mouth ulcers ◦ a white coating on your tongue ◦ pain in the mouth or throat ◦ difficulty eating or swallowing. • Avoid spicy, acidic or crunchy foods and very hot or cold food and drinks. • Try bland and soft foods. • Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush after each meal and at bedtime. If you normally floss continue to do so. • Rinse your mouth after you eat and brush your teeth, using either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 1/4 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of warm water, or ◦ 1/4 teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda in 1 cup of warm water • Ask your doctor or nurse for eviQ patient information - Mouth problems during cancer treatment. • Tell your doctor or nurse if you get any of the symptoms listed above.

Diarrhoea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may get bowel motions (stools, poo) that are more frequent or more liquid. • You may also get bloating, cramping or pain. • Take your antidiarrhoeal medication as directed by your doctor. • Drink plenty of fluids (unless you are fluid restricted). • Eat and drink small amounts more often. • Avoid spicy foods, dairy products, high fibre foods, and coffee. • Ask your doctor or nurse for eviQ patient information - Diarrhoea during cancer treatment. • Tell your doctor or nurse immediately, or go to your nearest hospital Emergency Department if your diarrhoea is not controlled, you have 4 or more loose bowel motions per day, and if you feel dizzy or light-headed.
Appetite loss (anorexia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may not feel like eating. • Try to avoid drinking fluids at meal times. • Try to eat small meals or snacks regularly throughout the day. • Try to eat food that is high in protein and calories. • If you are worried about how much food you can eat, or if you are losing weight, ask to speak to a dietitian.
Tiredness and lack of energy (fatigue)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may feel very tired, have no energy, sleep a lot, and not be able to do normal activities or things you enjoy. • Do not drive or operate machinery if you are feeling tired. • Nap for short periods (only 1 hour at a time) • Prioritise your tasks to ensure the best use of your energy. • Eat a well balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids (unless you are fluid restricted). • Try some gentle exercise daily. • Allow your friends and family to help. • Tell your doctor or nurse if you get any of the symptoms listed above.
Eye problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may get: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ eye pain ◦ red, sore or swollen eyes ◦ blurred vision ◦ watery or gritty eyes ◦ changes in your eyesight ◦ sensitivity to sunlight. • Protect your eyes from the weather (sun and wind) by wearing sunglasses, especially if you have lost your eyelashes. • Tell your doctor or nurse if you get any of the symptoms listed above. Eye drops may help with your symptoms.
Skin changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your skin may become dry, and you may notice changes to areas of your skin that have been exposed to the sun. • Keep your skin moisturised with a cream such as sorbolene or aqueous cream. • Avoid direct sunlight. • Protect your skin from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat, sun-protective clothing, sunglasses and sunscreen of SPF 50 or higher. • Tell your doctor or nurse if you notice any skin changes.
Skin rash (acneiform rash)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may get an acne-like skin rash. • Your skin may become red and dry. • Moisturise your skin with a gentle non-perfumed moisturising cream like sorbolene or aqueous cream. • Do not scratch your skin. • Do not use over-the-counter acne treatments as these can make the rash worse. • Protect your skin from the sun by wearing sun-protective clothing, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and sunscreen of SPF 50 or higher. • You may be given medications to prevent the rash. • Tell your doctor or nurse as soon as possible if you notice any changes to the rash like itching, pain or pus forming

Skin that is more sensitive to the sun (photosensitivity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After being out in the sun you may develop a rash like a bad sunburn. • Your skin may become red, swollen and blistered. • Avoid direct sunlight. • Protect your skin from the sun by wearing sun-protective clothing, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and a sunscreen of SPF 50 or higher. • Tell your doctor or nurse if you get any of the symptoms listed above.
Low blood magnesium, potassium and calcium levels (hypomagnesaemia, hypokalaemia, hypocalcaemia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This may be found from your routine blood tests and treated by your doctor. • If it is severe you may get: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ muscle cramps or twitches ◦ numbness or tingling in your fingers, toes or around your mouth ◦ constipation ◦ an irregular heartbeat ◦ sleepy, drowsy or confused • Tell your doctor or nurse as soon as possible if you get any of the signs or symptoms listed above.
Hand-foot syndrome (palmar-plantar erythrodysesthesia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The palms of your hands and soles of your feet may become: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ red and hot ◦ swollen ◦ painful and tender ◦ blistered. • The skin in the area may also peel. • Moisturise your hands and feet daily with sorbolene or aqueous cream. • Keep your hands and feet clean and dry. • Avoid hot water, instead use lukewarm water to bathe. • Avoid direct sunlight. • Avoid unnecessary walking, jogging or exercise. • Wear cotton socks and avoid tight-fitting shoes. • Tell your doctor or nurse as soon as possible if you notice any skin changes on your hands or feet.

Late (onset weeks to months)	
Low red blood cells (anaemia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may feel dizzy, light-headed, tired and appear more pale than usual. Tell your doctor or nurse if you have any of these signs or symptoms. You might need a blood transfusion. Tell your doctor or nurse immediately, or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department if you have any chest pain, trouble breathing, or feel like your heart is racing.
Skin colour changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may have darkening of your skin, especially in areas that are exposed to the sun. You may also notice darkening of your tongue, gums and over your finger joints. These skin changes may fade over time. Protect your skin from the sun by wearing sun-protective clothing, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and a sunscreen of SPF 50 or higher.
Hair changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your hair may become fine or curly and may break easily. Your eyelashes and eyebrows may grow more than normal. Use a gentle shampoo and a soft hairbrush. Take care with hair products like hairspray, hair dye, bleaches and perms. Ask your doctor or nurse about the Look Good Feel Better program (www.lgfb.org.au).
Swelling and pain around the fingernails or toenails (paronychia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The skin around your nails may swell and become painful. Apply a warm compress or soak your nails for 15 minutes, 3 or 4 times a day, in warm water or a mixture of equal parts vinegar and water. Keep your nails clean and short. Avoid things like biting your fingernails, getting a manicure, pedicure or false nails. Wear gloves when you wash the dishes, work in the garden, or clean the house. Tell your doctor or nurse if you get any of the symptoms listed above.
Lung problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lung problems are rare, but can be serious. They may occur throughout treatment or after the completion of treatment. You may get: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> shortness of breath fever dry cough wheezing fast heartbeat chest pain. Your doctor will monitor how well your lungs are working during your treatment. Tell your doctor or nurse immediately, or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department if you have chest pain or become short of breath.

General advice for people having cancer treatment

Chemotherapy safety

- Learn how to keep you and your family safe while you are having anticancer drugs.
- See our patient information sheet - [Chemotherapy safety at home](#).

Blood clot risk

- Cancer and anticancer drugs can increase the risk of a blood clot (thrombosis).
- Tell your doctor if you have a family history of blood clots.
- A blood clot can cause pain, redness, swelling in your arms or legs, shortness of breath or chest pain.
- If you have any of these symptoms go to your nearest hospital Emergency Department.

Medications and vaccinations

- Before you start treatment, tell your doctor about any medications you are taking, including vitamins or herbal supplements.
- Don't stop or start any medications during treatment without talking to your doctor and pharmacist first.

- Paracetamol is safe to take if you have a headache or other mild aches and pains. It is recommended that you avoid taking aspirin, ibuprofen and other anti-inflammatory type medications for pain while you are having treatment. However, if these medications have been prescribed by your doctor, do not stop taking them without speaking with your doctor.
- Vaccinations such as flu and tetanus vaccines are safe to receive while having treatment. Do not have any live vaccines during your treatment or for 6 months after it finishes. If you are unsure, check with your doctor before you have any vaccinations.
- People you live with should be fully vaccinated, including having live vaccines according to the current vaccination schedule. Extra care needs to be taken with hand washing and careful disposal of soiled nappies for infants who have recently received the rotavirus vaccine.

Other medical and dental treatment

- If you go to hospital or any other medical appointment (including dental appointments), always tell the person treating you that you are receiving anticancer drugs.
- Before you have any dental treatment, talk to your doctor.

Diet

- While you are receiving this treatment it is important that you try to maintain a healthy diet.
- Speak to your doctor or nurse about whether drinking alcohol is safe with your treatment.
- If you have any concerns about recent weight loss or weight gain or questions about your diet, ask to speak to a dietitian.

Fertility

- Some cancer treatments can reduce your fertility. This can make it difficult or impossible to get pregnant or father a child.
- Talk to your doctor or nurse before you start any treatment. Depending on your situation there may be fertility sparing options available to you and/or your partner, discuss these with your doctor or nurse.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

- Some cancer treatments can be dangerous to unborn babies. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you think there is any chance that you could be pregnant.
- Do not try to get pregnant or father a child during this treatment. Contraception should be used during treatment and after stopping treatment. Ask your doctor or nurse about what type of contraception you should use.
- If you are planning pregnancy/fatherhood after completing this treatment, talk to your doctor. Some doctors advise waiting between 6 months and 2 years after treatment.
- Do not breastfeed if you are on this treatment, as anti-cancer medications can also pass into breast milk.

Sex life and sexuality

- The desire to have sex may decrease as a result of this treatment or its side effects.
- Your emotions and the way you feel about yourself may also be affected by this treatment.
- It may help to discuss your concerns with your partner and doctor or nurse.

Quitting smoking

- It is never too late to quit smoking. Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to help your treatment work better.
- There are many effective tools to improve your chances of quitting.
- Talk to your treating team for more information and referral to a smoking cessation support service.

Staying active

- Research shows that exercise, no matter how small, has many benefits for people during and after cancer treatment.
- Talk to your doctor before starting an exercise program. Your doctor can advise whether you need a modified exercise program.

For more information about cancer treatment, side effects and side effect management see our [Patient and carers](#) section.

Where to get more information

Telephone support

- Call Cancer Council on 13 11 20 for cancer information and support

Head and neck cancer information

- Head and Neck Cancer Australia - headandneckcancer.org.au/

General cancer information and support

- Australian Rare Cancer (ARC) Portal – arcportal.org.au/
- Beyond Blue – beyondblue.org.au
- Beyond Five – beyondfive.org.au
- Cancer Australia – canceraustralia.gov.au
- Cancer Council Australia – cancer.org.au
- Cancer Voices Australia – cancervoicesaustralia.org
- CanTeen – canteen.org.au
- Carers Australia – carersaustralia.com.au
- Carer Help - carerhelp.com.au
- CHILL Cancer related hair loss - scalpcooling.org
- eviQ Cancer Treatments Online – eviQ.org.au
- LGBTQI+ People and Cancer - cancerCouncil.com.au/cancer-information/lgbtqi
- Look Good Feel Better – lgfb.org.au
- Patient Information – patients.cancer.nsw.gov.au
- Radiation Oncology Targeting Cancer – targetingcancer.com.au
- Redkite – redkite.org.au
- Return Unwanted Medicines – returnmed.com.au
- Staying active during cancer treatment – patients.cancer.nsw.gov.au/coping-with-cancer/physical-wellbeing/staying-active

Quit smoking information and support

Quitting smoking is helpful even after you have been diagnosed with cancer. The following resources provide useful information and support to help you quit smoking. Talk to your treating team about any other questions you may have.

- Call Quitline on 13 QUIT (13 78 48)
- iCanQuit – iCanQuit.com.au
- Patient Information – patients.cancer.nsw.gov.au/coping-with-cancer/physical-wellbeing/quitting-smoking
- Quitnow – quitnow.gov.au

Additional notes:

This document is a guide only and cannot cover every possible situation. The health professionals caring for you should always consider your individual situation when making decisions about your care. Contact your cancer clinic staff or doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your treatment, or you are having problems coping with side effects. While eviQ endeavours to link to reliable sources that provide accurate information, eviQ and the Cancer Institute NSW do not endorse or accept responsibility for the accuracy, currency, reliability or correctness of the content of linked external information sources. Use of this document is subject to eviQ's disclaimer available at www.eviq.org.au

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