

Head and neck squamous cell carcinoma recurrent or metastatic cisplatin (three weekly) and fluorouracil

ID: 288 v.5 Endorsed Essential Medicine List

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](#).

⚠ 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](#)

Treatment schedule - Overview

Cycle 1 and further cycles

Drug	Dose	Route	Day
cisplatin	75 mg/m ² *	IV infusion	1
Fluorouracil	4,000 mg/m ² (equivalent to 1000 mg/m ² /day)	CIV via pump over 96 hours	1

*The dose of cisplatin used in the original trial¹ was 100 mg/m² but it is the consensus of the eviQ Reference Committee that a lower dose of cisplatin is more appropriate in this setting, as this is used in several other malignancies in the palliative setting.

Frequency: 21 days

Cycles: continuous until disease progression or unacceptable toxicity (reassess response after 2 to 3 cycles; up to 6 cycles in responding patients)

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

Cost: ~ \$230

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 and further cycles

Day 1		
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)
Dexamethasone	12 mg (PO)	60 minutes before chemotherapy
ciSPlatin	75 mg/m ² (IV infusion)	in 1000 mL sodium chloride 0.9% over 60 minutes
Fluorouracil	4,000 mg/m ² (CIV)	via ambulatory infusion pump over 96 hours (equivalent to 1000 mg/m ² /day)
Day 2 to 4		
Dexamethasone	8 mg (PO)	ONCE a day (or in divided doses) with or after food.

The dose of cisplatin used in the original trial¹ was 100 mg/m² but it is the consensus of the eviQ Reference Committee that a lower dose of cisplatin is more appropriate in this setting, as is used in several other malignancies in the palliative setting.

Frequency: 21 days

Cycles: continuous until disease progression or unacceptable toxicity (reassess response after 2 to 3 cycles; up to 6 cycles in responding patients)

Indications and patient population

Indications:

- Recurrent or metastatic head and neck squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) in fit patients with performance status 0 to 2

Cautions/Exclusions:

- pre existing neuropathies [Grade 2](#) or greater
- moderate/severe renal impairment (creatinine clearance less than 60 mL/min.)
- significant hearing impairment/tinnitus.

Clinical information

Safety alert fluoropyrimidines

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.

Read more about the [medication safety alert for infusional fluorouracil and fluoropyrimidine overdose or overexposure](#)

Venous access	Central venous access device (CVAD) is required to administer this treatment. Read more about central venous access device line selection
Emetogenicity HIGH	Suggested default antiemetics have been added to the treatment schedule, and may be substituted to reflect institutional policy. Ensure that patients also have sufficient antiemetics for breakthrough emesis: Metoclopramide 10 mg three times a day when necessary (maximum of 30 mg/24 hours, up to 5 days) OR Prochlorperazine 10 mg PO every 6 hours when necessary. Read more about preventing anti-cancer therapy induced nausea and vomiting
Cardiac toxicity	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. Read more about cardiac toxicity associated with anti-cancer drugs
Diarrhoea	Antidiarrhoeals (e.g. loperamide) are usually prescribed with this treatment. Read more about treatment induced diarrhoea
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
Hydration	Hydration helps to prevent cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity. The default regimen is appropriate for patients with normal electrolytes, kidney function, fluid status etc. and should be adjusted according to individual requirements. Read more about cisplatin hydration regimens
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
Ototoxicity	Ototoxicity may occur with platinum-based therapy; patients should be monitored for signs and symptoms. Platinum compounds should be used with caution in patients with pre-existing conditions or risk factors. Ototoxicity may become more severe in patients being treated with other drugs with nephrotoxic potential e.g. aminoglycosides. An audiometry test should be performed if symptoms develop. Read more about ototoxicity - tinnitus and hearing loss
Peripheral neuropathy	Assess prior to each treatment. If a patient experiences grade 2 or greater peripheral neuropathy, a dose reduction, delay, or omission of treatment may be required; review by medical officer before commencing treatment. Read more about peripheral neuropathy Link to chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy screening tool
Speech pathology	All head and neck patients presenting with either a swallowing and /or communication problem should be referred
Blood tests	FBC, EUC, eGFR, LFTs, calcium and magnesium at baseline and prior to each 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	<p>Live vaccines are contraindicated in cancer patients receiving immunosuppressive therapy and/or who have poorly controlled malignant disease.</p> <p>Refer to the recommended schedule of vaccination for immunocompromised patients, as outlined in the Australian Immunisation Handbook.</p> <p>Read more about COVID-19 vaccines and cancer.</p>
Fertility, pregnancy and lactation	<p>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.</p> <p>Read more about the effect of cancer treatment on fertility</p>

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 \(ADDIKD\)](#).

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 cisplatin and fluorouracil by 25% for subsequent cycles
Febrile neutropenia	Delay treatment until recovery and consider reducing cisplatin 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 cisplatin and fluorouracil by 25% for

Haematological toxicity	
	subsequent cycles

Renal impairment	
eGFR (CKI-EPI or MDRD) or eCrCl (Cockcroft Gault) (mL/min) *	
greater than or equal to 70	No dose modifications necessary
50 to less than 70	Reduce cisplatin by 25%
30 to less than 50	Reduce fluorouracil by 25% and omit cisplatin and consider substituting carboplatin for cisplatin
less than 30	Reduce fluorouracil by 50% and omit cisplatin and consider substituting carboplatin for cisplatin

* Each method has its limitations; refer to [Nephrotoxicity associated with cisplatin](#) for more information.

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

Peripheral neuropathy	
Grade 2, Grade 3 or Grade 4	Omit cisplatin and consider substituting carboplatin for cisplatin

Mucositis and stomatitis	
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 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 the dose for subsequent cycles as follows: 1 st occurrence: No dose reduction 2 nd occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil 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

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

Hand foot syndrome (link to [Hand foot syndrome \(Palmar-plantar erythrodysesthesia\)](#))

	2 nd occurrence: Reduce fluorouracil 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

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](#).

Cisplatin

	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
Neurotoxic drugs (e.g. vincristine, paclitaxel)	Additive neurotoxicity	Monitor closely for neuropathy if combination used
Paclitaxel	Administration schedule may influence the development of myelosuppression	Minimise toxicity by administering paclitaxel first in regimens using the combination
Carbamazepine, phenytoin, valproate	Decreased antiepileptic plasma levels	Monitor antiepileptic serum levels and seizure frequency for efficacy; adjust dosage as appropriate or select alternative antiepileptic (e.g. clonazepam, diazepam, lorazepam)

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: 4.5 hours

[Safe handling and waste management](#)

[Safe administration](#)

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

[Peripheral neuropathy assessment tool](#)

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 antiemetics taken or administer as prescribed.

Verify dexamethasone taken or administer as prescribed.

⌚ Chemotherapy - Time out

Cisplatin

Commence prehydration for cisplatin:

- administer 10 mmol magnesium sulphate (MgSO₄) in 1000 mL sodium chloride 0.9% over 60 minutes
- ensure patient has passed urine prior to cisplatin administration as per institutional policy.

Administer cisplatin (irritant):

- via IV infusion over 60 minutes
- flush with 100 mL of sodium chloride 0.9%.


Post hydration:

- 1000 mL sodium chloride 0.9% over 60 minutes.

20/11/23 Mannitol information removed to align with updated ID 184 [Prevention and management of cisplatin induced nephrotoxicity](#).

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)

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)

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
Photosensitivity	Increased sensitivity to ultraviolet (UV) light resulting in an exaggerated sunburn-like reaction accompanied by stinging sensations and urticaria.
Peripheral neuropathy	Typically symmetrical sensory neuropathy, affecting the fingers and toes, sometimes progressing to the hands and feet. It is associated with several classes of anti-cancer drugs. These include taxanes, platinum-based compounds, vinca alkaloids and some drugs used to treat multiple myeloma. Read more about peripheral neuropathy
Nephrotoxicity	Renal dysfunction resulting from damage to the glomeruli, tubules or renal vasculature.
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
Ototoxicity	Tinnitus and hearing loss may occur due to damage in the inner ear. Tinnitus is usually reversible, while hearing loss is generally irreversible. Hearing loss is dose-related, cumulative and may be worse in those with pre-existing hearing problems. Read more about ototoxicity - tinnitus and hearing loss

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.
Nail changes	Hyperpigmentation, paronychia, onycholysis, splinter haemorrhage, pyogenic granuloma formation, subungal haematoma and subungal hyperkeratosis are some of the nail changes associated with anti-cancer drugs. Read more about nail toxicities
Alopecia - partial	Hair thinning and/or patchy hair loss. Patients can also experience mild to moderate discomfort of the hair follicles, and rarely pain as the hair is falling out. Read more about alopecia and scalp cooling

Evidence

The evidence for the use of this regimen comes from a comparison of three regimens to treat recurrent or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck. 261 eligible patients were randomised to receive either: ¹

1. Cisplatin 100 mg/m² IV day 1 + fluorouracil 1000 mg/m² per day as a continuous IV infusion for 96 hours every 3 weeks
2. Carboplatin 300 mg/m² IV day 1 + fluorouracil 1000 mg/m² per day as a continuous IV infusion for 96 hours every 3 weeks
3. Methotrexate 40 mg/m² IV weekly

Efficacy

Forastiere et al¹ concluded from their randomised study that combination chemotherapy resulted in improved response rates but was associated with increased toxicity and no improvement in overall survival. Therefore new treatments that may alter the course of disease in recurrent head and neck cancer patients still need to be identified¹.

Forastiere ¹	Cisplatin/5FU (%)	Carboplatin/5FU (%)	Methotrexate (%)
Complete response	6	2	2
Partial response	26	19	8
Stable/no response	37	42	50
Increasing disease	16	25	32
Assumed no response*	15	12	8

* early death or not assessable

Toxicity

Toxicity ¹	Cisplatin/5FU		Carboplatin/5FU		Methotrexate	
	Grade 1 to 2 (%)	Grade 3 to 4 (%)	Grade 1 to 2 (%)	Grade 3 to 4 (%)	Grade 1 to 2 (%)	Grade 3 to 4 (%)
Anaemia	55	5	42	14	25	3
Leukopenia	42	31	50	12	29	16
Thrombocytopenia	13	6	19	13	9	6
Diarrhoea	12	2	6	2	3	0
Stomatitis	19	14	28	15	34	10
Nausea/vomiting	68	8	48	6	38	8
Peripheral neuropathy	5	1	2	0	0	0
Ototoxicity	8	4	2	0	2	0

Toxicity ¹	Cisplatin/5FU		Carboplatin/5FU		Methotrexate	
	Grade 1 to 2 (%)	Grade 3 to 4 (%)	Grade 1 to 2 (%)	Grade 3 to 4 (%)	Grade 1 to 2 (%)	Grade 3 to 4 (%)
Renal	18	9	1	1	3	3

References

- 1 Forastiere, A. A., B. Metch, D. E. Schuller, et al. 1992. "Randomized comparison of cisplatin plus fluorouracil and carboplatin plus fluorouracil versus methotrexate in advanced squamous-cell carcinoma of the head and neck: a Southwest Oncology Group study." *J.Clin Oncol.* 10(8):1245-1251.

History

Version 5

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.5. Read more about as required review protocol status in this factsheet .

Version 4

Date	Summary of changes
27/07/2007	New clinical instructions and patient sheet updated.
16/10/2007	Safety alert added.
26/03/2010	Review, new dose modifications and transferred to eviQ.
13/05/2010	Cisplatin hydration changed to outpatient regimen.
02/07/2010	Haematological dose modifications updated (20% changed to 25% dose reduction).
07/06/2011	PHC view created.
29/07/2011	Protocol reviewed at reference committee meeting 29/07/11. Title updated to include use in the recurrent setting. Cisplatin dose reduced from 100 mg/m ² to 75 mg/m ² as it was felt that a lower dose was more appropriate in this setting. Cycles: Updated to "up to 6 cycles in responding patients" was previously "4 to 6 cycles in responding patients". Dose modifications for renal impairment - cisplatin omitted in patients with creatinine clearance less than 50 mL/min. Dose modifications for peripheral neuropathy - cisplatin omitted in patients grade 2 or above peripheral neuropathy.
18/08/2011	New format to allow for export of protocol information. Protocol version number changed to V.2. Antiemetics and premedications added to the treatment schedule. Additional Clinical Information, Key Prescribing table and Key Administration table combined into new section titled Clinical Information. Drug specific information placed behind the drug name link. FAQ: Question on alcohol removed.
10/11/2011	Link to the new protocol ID 1138 cisplatin fluorouracil with cetuximab added. Dental assessment information removed as more relevant to protocols with radiotherapy. Patient information - Added information on pump change.

Date	Summary of changes
10/04/2012	PHC OMIS view added.
01/06/2012	PHC CVAD Pre Clin added. PHC OMIS view published.
03/05/2013	Reviewed at reference committee meeting. No changes and next review in 2 years.
10/07/2013	Dose modifications for cisplatin updated.
12/08/2014	PHC view removed.
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	Reviewed by Medical Oncology Reference Committee. Evidence updated. Review 2 years.
31/05/2017	Transferred to new eviQ website. Version number changed to V.3. Antiemetic change: Netupitant/palonosetron combination has replaced aprepitant and a 5HT ₃ receptor antagonist in combination with dexamethasone for all highly emetogenic regimens. Hepatitis B screening changed to NOT recommended.
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.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

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08 Mar 2024

Patient information - Head and neck cancer recurrent or metastatic - Cisplatin (three weekly) and fluorouracil

Patient's name:

Your treatment

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


Cisplatin and fluorouracil

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	Cisplatin (<i>siss-PLAT-in</i>)	By a drip into a vein	About 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

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>	Emergency contact details Ask your doctor or nurse from your treating team who to contact if you have a problem
<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.	Daytime:..... Night/weekend:..... Other instructions:.....

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).

Other information about your treatment

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.

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)	
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)	
Infection risk (neutropenia)	<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.
<p>Diarrhoea</p>	<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 anti-diarrhoeal 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.
<p>Appetite loss (anorexia)</p>	<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.
<p>Tiredness and lack of energy (fatigue)</p>	<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 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.
Nerve damage (peripheral neuropathy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may notice a change in the sensations in your hands and feet, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ tingling or pins and needles ◦ numbness or loss of feeling ◦ pain. • You may find it difficult to do everyday activities, such as doing up buttons or picking up small objects. • Test water temperature with your elbow when bathing to avoid burns. • Use rubber gloves, pot holders and oven mitts in the kitchen. • Wear rubber shoes or boots when working in the garden or garage. • Keep rooms well lit and uncluttered. • Ask your doctor or nurse for eviQ patient information – Nerve problems during cancer treatment. • Tell your doctor or nurse if you get any of the symptoms listed above.
Kidney damage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This treatment can cause changes to how your kidneys work. • You will have blood tests to make sure your kidneys are working properly. • You may need to drink more fluids while you are having treatment. Your doctor or nurse will tell you if you need to do this. • Tell your doctor or nurse as soon as possible if you notice that your urine changes colour or you don't need to empty your bladder as often.
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.
Hearing changes (ototoxicity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may get ringing in your ears or loss of hearing. • You may have your hearing tested before and during your treatment. • Tell your doctor or nurse as soon as possible if you notice any changes to your hearing.

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.
Nail changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your nails may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ grow more slowly ◦ become darker ◦ develop ridges or white lines ◦ become brittle and flaky • In some cases, you may lose your nails completely. • 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.
Hair thinning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your hair may become dry and may break easily. • You may lose some of your hair. • Use a gentle shampoo and a soft hairbrush. • Take care with hair products like hairspray, hair dye, bleaches and perms. • Protect your scalp from the cold with a hat or scarf. • Protect your scalp from the sun with a hat and sunscreen of SPF 50 or higher. • Ask your doctor or nurse about the Look Good Feel Better program (www.lgfb.org.au)

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.

Risk of developing a second cancer

- Some anticancer treatments can increase your chance of developing a second cancer, this is rare. Your doctor will discuss with you the specific risks of your treatment.

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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