



KEEP ALL MEDICINE OUT OF THE SIGHT AND REACH OF CHILDREN

Imatinib

What is imatinib?

- Imatinib is pronounced im-at-tin-ib. It is also known by its brand name Gleevec (pronounced glee-vec). It is a type of biological therapy called a tyrosine kinase inhibitor (TKI). Tyrosine kinases are proteins that cells use to signal to each other to grow. They act as chemical messengers. There are a number of different tyrosine kinases.
- Imatinib blocks particular protein kinases and stops the cancer cells growing.
- Imatinib is a treatment for
 - Chronic myeloid leukaemia which is Philadelphia chromosome positive
 - Gastro Intestinal Stromal Tumour (GIST) – a rare type of stomach cancer
 - Acute lymphoblastic leukaemia which is Philadelphia chromosome positive
 - A rare type of sarcoma called dermatofibrosarcoma protuberans
 - Adults with myelodysplastic disorders
 - Adults with myeloproliferative disorders
 - Adults with advanced HES (hypereosinophilic syndrome) or chronic eosinophilic leukaemia
- Imatinib targets different tyrosine kinases, depending on the type of cancer.

How you have imatinib

- You have imatinib as a tablet that you swallow whole, with a glass of water after food. If you can't swallow the tablets, you can dissolve them in a glass of mineral water or apple juice. Drop the whole tablets into the fluid, and stir with a spoon until the tablets have broken up completely. Then drink the whole glassful.
- It is very important that you take tablets according to the instructions your doctor or pharmacist gave you. Whether you have a full or empty stomach, for example, can affect how much of a drug gets into your bloodstream. You should take the right dose, not more or less. And never stop taking a cancer drug without talking to your specialist first.
- You have the imatinib either once or twice a day, depending on the dose you are taking. You usually continue taking imatinib for as long as it works, unless the side effects get too bad. For acute lymphoblastic leukaemia that is Philadelphia chromosome positive, you may have imatinib on its own, or with chemotherapy.

Common side effects

More than 10 in every 100 people have one or more of the side effects listed below.

- A temporary drop in the number of blood cells made by the bone marrow can cause
- An increased risk of getting an infection from a drop in white blood cells – it is harder to fight infections and you can become very ill. You may have headaches, aching muscles, a cough, sore throat, pain passing urine or feel cold and shivery
- Tiredness and breathlessness due to a drop in red blood cells (anaemia) – you may need a blood transfusion
- Bruising easily due to a drop in platelets – you may have nosebleeds, bleeding gums after brushing your teeth, or lots of tiny red spots or bruises on your arms or legs (known as petechia)



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- Some of these side effects can be life threatening, particularly infections. You should contact your doctor or specialist nurse if you have any of these effects. Your doctor will check your blood counts regularly to see how well your bone marrow is working.
- Fatigue (tiredness) during and after treatment in about 3 out of 10 people (30%) – most people find that their energy levels are back to normal within 6 months to a year
- Fluid buildup in about 6 out of 10 people (60%) – it may cause weight gain, or fluid around the lungs, making you feel breathless. Rarely, you may also get fluid in your abdomen and around your eyes
- Feeling sick in about 3 in 10 people (30%) – this is usually well controlled with anti sickness medicines
- Diarrhoea in about 1 in 3 people (30%) – drink plenty of fluid and tell your doctor if diarrhoea becomes severe, or continues for more than 3 days
- Headaches
- Indigestion
- Loss of appetite
- A skin rash in about 4 out of 10 people (40%) – your skin may be dry and itchy
- Weakness
- A high temperature (fever) and night sweats
- Loss of fertility – we don't know exactly what effect this drug may have on your fertility, so talk to your doctor before starting treatment if having a baby is important to you

Occasional side effects

Between 1 and 10 in every 100 people have one or more of these.

- Constipation – your doctor or nurse may give you laxatives to help prevent this but do tell them if you are constipated for more than 3 days
- A sore mouth
- A mild effect on the liver – you are unlikely to notice any symptoms from this and your liver will almost certainly go back to normal after the treatment finishes. Your doctor will do regular blood tests to check how your liver is working
- Taste changes
- Weight loss
- Dizziness
- Difficulty sleeping (insomnia)
- Itching, redness and swelling of the eyes (conjunctivitis) or watery eyes
- Blurred vision
- Pain or swelling in your tummy (abdomen)
- Wind (flatulence)
- Hair loss or thinning
- Numbness of the hands or feet
- Mouth ulcers
- Joint pain and swelling



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Rare side effects

Fewer than 1 in 100 people have these.

- A buildup of fluid around the heart, causing low blood pressure
- Breast tenderness and swelling – doctors think this is because imatinib lowers the amount of the sex hormone (testosterone)

Important points to remember

The side effects above may be mild or more severe. A side effect may get worse through your course of treatment, or more side effects may develop as the course goes on. This depends on

- How many times you've had the drug before
- Your general health
- The amount of the drug you have (the dose)
- Other drugs you are having

Coping with side effects

Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse about all your side effects so that they can help you manage them. They can give you advice or reassure you. Your nurse will give you a contact number to ring if you have any questions or problems. If in doubt, call them.

Other medicines

Tell your doctor about any other medicines you are taking, including vitamins, herbal supplements and over the counter remedies – some drugs can react together. Also, if you want to start taking any new medicine or supplement while you are taking imatinib, talk to your doctor first. Some drugs can reduce how well imatinib works.

Pregnancy and contraception

These drugs may have a harmful effect on a developing baby and it is not advisable to become pregnant or father a child if you are having this treatment. Talk about contraception with your doctor or nurse before treatment starts.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is not advisable during this treatment because the drug may come through in the breast milk.

Medical and dental treatment

If you need to go into hospital for any reason other than cancer, always tell the doctors and nurses that you are having chemotherapy. Give them contact details for your cancer doctor.

Talk to your cancer doctor or nurse if you think you need dental treatment. Always tell your dentist you are having chemotherapy.

Immunisations and chemotherapy

- You should not have immunisations with live vaccines while you are having chemotherapy or for at least 6 months afterwards. These include rubella, mumps, measles (usually given together as MMR), BCG, yellow fever and Zostavax (shingles vaccine).



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- You can have other vaccines, but they may not give you as much protection as usual until your immune system has fully recovered from your chemotherapy.
- It is safe to have the flu vaccine.
- It is safe for you to be in contact with other people who've had live vaccines as injections.
- You might need to make sure that you aren't in contact with anyone who has had oral polio, cholera or typhoid vaccination recently.