

**Medication Information Sheet****epoetin** (ee-POH-ee-tin)

*This document provides general information about your medication. It does not replace the advice of your health care professional. Always discuss your therapy with your health care professional and refer to the package insert for more details.*

**Other Name:** Eprex ®, erythropoietin

**Appearance:** Clear, colourless solution in pre-filled syringes

**What is this medication for?**

- Epoetin is a medication used to treat severe anemia (a low red blood cell count) caused by chemotherapy. It helps your bone marrow to make red blood cells.
- The preferred treatment for severe anemia is a blood transfusion, if this is appropriate for you.
- If you are not able to get a blood transfusion then your health care team will talk to you about treating your anemia with epoetin instead.
- Taking epoetin does have some risks. Studies have shown that some people who take epoetin have had shorter survival times than those who do not. Please discuss the risks and benefits with your doctor before using epoetin.

**What should I do before I have this medication?**

- Tell your health care team if you have or had significant medical condition(s), such as:
  - ◊ uncontrolled high blood pressure
  - ◊ heart problems
  - ◊ blood clots
  - ◊ seizures
  - ◊ or any allergies
- Patients with cancer have a higher risk of getting blood clots. Some cancer treatments may increase this risk. Discuss this with your health care team.

**How will this medication affect sex, pregnancy and breastfeeding?**

- Some studies done with animals suggest that this medication may harm the baby if used by pregnant women. No effects have yet been seen in humans but it is important to use caution. Talk to your health care team to figure out the best birth control method(s) for you and/or your partner.

- Let your health care team know if you or your partner is pregnant, becomes pregnant during treatment, or if you are breastfeeding.
- Do not breastfeed while using this drug.
- This medication may affect fertility (ability to get pregnant)

## How is this medication given?

- This drug is given by injection under the skin in the arms, thighs or belly.
- Your doctor or nurse may teach you how to give the injection yourself at home.
- If you are preparing and injecting the medication yourself, be sure you understand the instructions from your health care team.
- Do not shake the drug solution since this may damage the drug.

## What else do I need to know while on this medication?

- Make sure your health care team knows about all your medications (prescription, over-the-counter, herbals and supplements). Check with your health care team before starting or stopping any of them.
- Your doctor may advise you to also take iron supplements to help make red blood cells. Do not take an iron supplement without speaking to your doctor first.

## How should I safely store this medication?

- Keep in the refrigerator, but do not freeze. Keep out of sight and reach of children and pets.
- Do not throw out any unused medications at home. Bring them to your pharmacy to be thrown away safely.
- Never reuse syringes, needle covers and needles. These must always be disposed in a puncture-proof container. Ask your pharmacist for help on how to properly dispose of these items, including the filled container.
- If the pre-filled syringe is about to be used, it may be stored at room temperature (not above 25°C) for one single period of maximum 7 days.

## What are the side effects of this medication?

You may not have all of the side effects below. You may have side effects that are not listed.

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
<b>Less Common Side Effects (in 10 to 24 out of 100 people)</b>	
<p><b>Flu-like symptoms</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may have fever, chills and muscle pain without any signs of infection, such as a sore throat, cough or skin rash.</li> <li>It may happen at any time after you receive your treatment and it usually goes away as your body gets used to the medication.</li> <li>Contact your health care team if these feelings bother you.</li> <li>Check your temperature to make sure you don't have a fever. If you do not have a fever, you may take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) tablets to help you feel better. Ask your health care team for the correct dose for you. <b>If you do have a fever, speak to your health care team or go to the nearest emergency room.</b></li> </ul>	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
<p><b>Diarrhea</b></p> <p>May happen days to weeks after you get your treatment.</p> <p><b>If you have diarrhea :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take anti-diarrhea medication if your health care team prescribed it.</li> <li>Avoid foods or drinks with artificial sweetener (e.g. chewing gum, "diet" drinks), coffee and alcohol.</li> <li>Eat many small meals and snacks instead of 2 or 3 large meals.</li> <li>Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of liquids each day. Talk to your health care team if you can't drink 6-8 cups of liquids each day when you have diarrhea. You may need special liquids with salt and sugar, called Oral Rehydration Therapy.</li> </ul> <p>See the <a href="#">Diarrhea</a> pamphlet for more information.</p>	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
<p><b>Mild swelling in arms and legs; puffiness</b></p> <p><b>To help prevent swelling :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eat a low-salt diet.</li> <li>Avoid tight fitting clothing.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have swelling in your legs, keep your feet up when sitting.</b></p>	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
<b>Less Common Side Effects (in 10 to 24 out of 100 people)</b>	
<p><b>Constipation</b> (less frequent than diarrhea)</p> <p><b>To help prevent constipation :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink more liquids and eat well. Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of liquids each day unless you have been told otherwise.</li> <li>• Be Active. Exercise can help to keep you regular.</li> <li>• Try to eat more fiber (e.g. fruits with skin, leafy greens and whole grains). If you take opioid pain medication, ask your health care team if eating more fibre is right for you.</li> </ul> <p><b>To help treat constipation :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you have not had a bowel movement in 2 to 3 days you may need to take a laxative. Ask your health care team what to do.</li> </ul> <p>See the <a href="#">Constipation</a> Pamphlet for more information.</p>	<p>Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe</p>
<p><b>High blood pressure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check your blood pressure regularly. Your doctor may prescribe medication to treat high blood pressure.</li> <li>• If you have a severe headache, severe dizziness, or if you faint get emergency help right away as it may be a sign your blood pressure is too high.</li> </ul>	<p>Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe</p>

**Other rare, but serious side effects are possible. If you experience ANY of the following, speak to your cancer health care provider or get emergency medical help right away:**

- Severe rash, skin blisters or peeling
- Injection site swelling, itching
- Swollen lips, face or tongue, chest and throat tightness
- Swelling in your legs, ankles and belly
- Pain, swelling and hardening of the vein in an arm or leg
- Trouble breathing, have chest pain or cough up blood
- Tingling in the hands and feet
- Confusion, trouble seeing, speaking, or using your arms and legs
- Seizures
- Sudden and severe tiredness, shortness of breath during mild activity
- Nosebleeds, unusual bruising, bleeding from the mouth or gums,
- Severe belly pain, vomiting blood or what looks like coffee-grounds, passing poo with bright red blood or which looks black or tarry-coloured

For more links on how to manage your symptoms go to [www.cancercareontario.ca/symptoms](http://www.cancercareontario.ca/symptoms).

*The information set out in the medication information sheets, regimen information sheets, and symptom management information (for patients) contained in the Drug Formulary (the "Formulary") is intended to be used by health professionals and patients for informational purposes only. The information is not intended to cover all possible uses, directions, precautions, drug interactions or side effects of a certain drug, nor should it be used to indicate that use of a particular drug is safe, appropriate or effective for a given condition.*

*A patient should always consult a healthcare provider if he/she has any questions regarding the information set out in the Formulary. The information in the Formulary is not intended to act as or replace medical advice and should not be relied upon in any such regard. All uses of the Formulary are subject to clinical judgment and actual prescribing patterns may not follow the information provided in the Formulary.*