



# NEBRASKA CANCER SPECIALISTS

*the Physicians of Oncology Hematology West*

## **Carmustine**

**Trade name:** BCNU<sup>®</sup>

**Drug type:** Carmustine is an anti-cancer/cytotoxic chemotherapy drug.

### **How this drug is given:**

- Carmustine is given by an infusion into a vein (intravenous, IV)

### **Side effects:**

Important things to remember about the side effects of carmustine:

- Most people do not experience all of the side effects listed.
- Side effects are almost always reversible and will usually go away after treatment is complete.
- There are many options to help minimize or prevent side effects.

### **The following side effects are common for patients receiving carmustine:**

- Nausea and vomiting, usually within 2-4 hours of infusion, lasting for about 4-6 hours. Anti-nausea medication is given prior to infusion to prevent or decrease this side effect.
- Facial flushing
- Pain and burning at the injection site (can be relieved by diluting the drug, let your health care provider know if you are experiencing pain during the infusion)
- Low blood counts; white blood cells and platelets may temporarily decrease.

### **These are less common side effects for patients receiving carmustine:**

- Increases in blood tests measuring liver function, these return to normal once treatment is stopped.
- Low red blood cell counts
- Low blood pressure
- Dizziness, loss of coordination
- Eye problems: (temporary redness and/or blurring), retinal bleeding

### **Delayed effects:**

- Pulmonary toxicity (damage to the lungs) is uncommon in low doses of carmustine. However it is more common with cumulative or high doses. This toxicity may be delayed up to 3 years after treatment. A history of lung disease may increase the risk of this reaction, or use of other lung-toxic drugs.
- There is a slight risk of developing a blood cancer such as leukemia after taking carmustine. Talk to your doctor about this risk.

## **When to contact your health care provider:**

Contact your health care provider ***immediately***, day or night, if you should experience any of the following symptoms:

- Fever of 101°F or higher, chills (possible signs of infection).

The following symptoms require medical attention, but are not an emergency. Contact your health care provider ***within 24 hours*** of noticing any of the following:

- Nausea (interferes with ability to eat and unrelieved with prescribed medication)
- Vomiting (vomiting more than 4-5 times in a 24 hour period)
- Unusual bleeding or bruising
- Black or tarry stools, or blood in your stools or urine
- Extreme fatigue (unable to carry on self-care activities)
- Yellowing of eyes or skin, change in color of stools or urine

**Always inform your health care provider if you experience any unusual symptoms.**