



NEBRASKA CANCER SPECIALISTS

the Physicians of Oncology Hematology West

Cytarabine

Trade names: Cytosar-U[®]

Other names: Ara-C

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

How this drug is given:

- Cytarabine may be given as an infusion into the vein (intravenous or IV).
- As an injection into the layer of tissue between the skin and the muscle (subcutaneous or SubQ).
- As an injection into the muscle (intramuscular or IM).
- Another method it is given is by intraventricular or intrathecal infusion. This method is used when drugs need to reach the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) the fluid that is surrounding the brain and spinal cord, the drug is infused directly into the spinal fluid.

Side effects:

Important things to remember about the side effects of cytarabine:

- 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 cytarabine:

- Low blood counts; white and red blood cells and platelets may temporarily decrease
- Nausea and vomiting
- Mouth sores (usually occur 7-10 days after therapy)
- Blood test abnormalities: Increase in blood level of uric acid
- Increases in blood tests measuring liver function. These return to normal once treatment is discontinued. More often associated with high-dose regimens.

These are less common side effects for patients receiving cytarabine:

- Diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Skin rash, redness and itching
- Flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, generalized aches and pains) within the first few days of treatment

- Pain redness and skin peeling of the palms of hands and soles of feet (hand-foot syndrome) may occur with high-dose therapy (rare). Use of steroid creams or moisturizers may be helpful.
- Temporary hair loss (uncommon, but thinning may occur).
- Eye pain, tearing, sensitivity to light and blurred vision may occur with high-dose therapy. Often steroid drops or ointment to the eyes are used to prevent or relieve this condition.
- Dizziness, headache, excessive sleepiness, confusion, loss of balance may occur in up to 10% of patients receiving high dose therapy. Onset is usually 5 days after treatment and may last up to 1 week. More often these toxicities are mild and reversible.

When to contact your doctor or 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 or chills (possible signs of infection).
- Chest pain or heart palpitations
- Inability to pass urine

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:

- Diarrhea (4-6 episodes in a 24 hour period)
- Nausea (unable to drink fluids and unrelieved with prescription medication)
- 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)
- Mouth sores (painful redness, swelling or ulcers)
- Cough and/or shortness of breath
- Excessive sleepiness or confusion
- Changes in balance and coordination
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Changes in vision or burning/or tearing of eyes
- Swelling, redness and pain in one leg or arm and not the other
- Stomach pains

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