



# NEBRASKA CANCER SPECIALISTS

*the Physicians of Oncology Hematology West*

## **Doxorubicin**

**Brand names:** Adriamycin<sup>®</sup>

### **Drug type:**

Doxorubicin is an anti-cancer/cytotoxic chemotherapy drug.

### **How doxorubicin is given:**

- Doxorubicin is given through a vein by intravenous injection (IV). Doxorubicin can also be given by continuous infusion.
- Doxorubicin is a vesicant. A vesicant is a chemical that causes extensive tissue damage and blistering if it escapes from the vein. If you notice redness or swelling at the IV site while you are receiving doxorubicin, alert your nurse.

### **Side effects of doxorubicin:**

Important things to remember about the side effects of doxorubicin:

- You will not get all of the side effects mentioned below.
- Side effects are almost always reversible and will usually go away after therapy is complete.
- Side effects are quite manageable. There are many options to minimize or prevent them.

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

Early Side Effects: (within one week after treatment begins)

- Pain along the site where the medication was given
- Nausea or vomiting

Later Side Effects: (within two weeks after treatment begins)

- Low blood counts. Your white and red blood cells and platelets may temporarily decrease.
- Mouth sores
- Hair loss on the scalp or elsewhere on the body. Most patients do lose some or all of their hair during their treatment. But your hair will grow back after treatment is completed.

### **These are less common side effects for patients taking doxorubicin:**

Early side effects: (within one week after treatment begins)

- Eyes watering
- Urine may appear red, red-brown, orange or pink from the color of the medication for one to two days after you receive a dose.

Later: (within two weeks after treatment begins)

- Darkening of the nail beds.
- Darkening of the skin where previous radiation treatment has been given.
- Problems with fertility – ability to bear children. (this should be discussed with your doctor prior to therapy).

A serious but uncommon side effect of Doxorubicin can be interference with the pumping action of the heart.

### **Delayed effects of doxorubicin:**

There is a slight risk of developing a blood cancer such as leukemia years after taking Doxorubicin. Talk to your doctor about this risk.

### **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, chills (possible signs of infection)
- Blistering at the IV site
- Shortness of breath, wheezing, difficulty breathing, closing up of the throat, swelling of facial features, hives (possible allergic reaction).

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

- Mouth sores (painful redness, swelling or ulcers)
- Nausea (interferes with ability to eat and unrelieved with prescribed medication)
- Vomiting (vomiting more than 4-5 times in a 24 hour period)
- Diarrhea (4-6 episodes in a 24-hour period)
- Fast or irregular heart beats
- Unusual bleeding or bruising
- Black or tarry stools, or blood in your stools or urine
- Extreme fatigue (unable to carry on self-care activities)
- Swelling of the feet or ankles

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