



# NEBRASKA CANCER SPECIALISTS

*the Physicians of Oncology Hematology West*

## 5-FU

**Generic name:** Fluorouracil

**Drug type:** 5-FU is an anti-cancer/cytotoxic chemotherapy drug.

### **How 5-FU is given:**

- 5-FU is given through an infusion into a vein (intravenous, IV), or as a continuous infusion.

### **Side effects of 5-FU:**

Important things to remember about the side effects of 5-FU:

- 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 5-FU:**

- Diarrhea
- Nausea and possible occasional vomiting
- Mouth sores
- Poor appetite
- Watery eyes, sensitivity to light
- Taste changes, metallic taste in mouth during infusion
- Discoloration along vein through which the medication is given
- Low blood counts. Your white and red blood cells and platelets may temporarily decrease.

### **These are less common side effects for patients receiving 5-FU:**

- Skin reactions: Dry, cracking, peeling skin. Darkening of the skin (hyperpigmentation), darkening of the skin where previous radiation treatment has been given.
- Hair thinning.
- Nail changes - discoloration, loss of nails (rare)
- Hand-foot syndrome (Palmar-plantar erythrodysesthesia or PPE) -skin rash, swelling, redness, pain and/or peeling of the skin on the palms of hands and soles of feet. Usually mild, starting 5-6 weeks after start of treatment. May require reductions in the dose of the medication.

## **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, 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)
- Diarrhea (4-6 episodes in a 24-hour period) despite anti-diarrhea medication and diet alterations.
- 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)
- Tingling or burning, redness, swelling of the palms of the hands or soles of feet

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