



# NEBRASKA CANCER SPECIALISTS

*the Physicians of Oncology Hematology West*

## Melphalan

**Trade name:** Alkeran<sup>®</sup>

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

### How this drug is given:

- As a pill by mouth.
- Take medication on an empty stomach (1 hour before to 2 hours after meals).
- Melphalan can also be given through an infusion into a vein (intravenous, IV).

### Side effects:

Important things to remember about the side effects of melphalan:

- 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 melphalan:

- Low blood counts; white and red blood cells and platelets may temporarily decrease. This effect may be prolonged and cumulative.
- Nausea and vomiting. (mild with regular dosing, can be severe with high-dose therapy)

### These are less common side effects for patients receiving melphalan:

- Allergic reaction. (rare with pill form, happen in about 10% of patients treated with IV form).
- Mouth sores. (mild with regular dosing, can be severe with high-dose therapy).
- Diarrhea. (mild with regular dosing, can be severe with high-dose therapy).
- Loss of fertility/ability to conceive or father a child may be affected by melphalan. Discuss this issue with your health care provider.
- Hair loss. (rare with regular dosing, common with high-dose used for bone marrow transplant).
- Nephrotoxicity: Uncommon with regular doses, seen when melphalan is given in high-doses used for bone marrow transplant.
- Arrhythmias: Uncommon with regular doses, seen when melphalan is given in high-doses used for bone marrow transplant.

### **Delayed effects:**

- There is a slight risk of developing a blood cancer such as leukemia or myelodysplasia after taking melphalan. Talk to your doctor about this risk.

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

Seek emergency help ***immediately*** and notify your health care provider, if you experience the following symptoms:

- Shortness of breath, wheezing, difficulty breathing, closing up of the throat, swelling of facial features, hives (possible allergic reaction).

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)
- Unusual bleeding or bruising
- Black or tarry stool or blood in your stools or urine
- Extreme fatigue (unable to carry on self-care activities)
- Mouth sores (painful redness, swelling or ulcers)
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Signs of infection such as redness or swelling, pain on swallowing, coughing up mucous, or painful urination

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