



NEBRASKA CANCER SPECIALISTS

the Physicians of Oncology Hematology West

Thalidomide

Trade name: Thalomid®

Drug type: Thalidomide is classified as an immunomodulatory/antiangiogenic agent.

How this drug is given:

- As a capsule by mouth.
- It is usually taken at night, about an hour before you go to bed, to decrease sleepiness during the daytime.
- In order to receive this drug, there are strict guidelines that you must follow. You will be required to participate in a special program called the "System for Thalidomide Education and Prescribing Safety" (STEPS). You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire before you receive the medication, and every month, while you are taking the drug. Only certain pharmacists and doctors may prescribe or dispense this medication.

Side effects:

Important things to remember about the side effects of thalidomide:

- 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 thalidomide:

- Severe life-threatening human birth defects if taken during pregnancy.
- Sedative effects: fatigue, sleepiness, weakness, confusion, mood changes. You may develop tolerance to the sedative effects of thalidomide after several weeks of therapy.
- Skin rashes; itching, redness, usually occurring over the trunk, back, arms and legs. It is important that all new rashes be reported to your health care professional immediately. If rash occurs thalidomide should be stopped and only restarted after evaluated by health care professional. Although rare, thalidomide may cause a severe skin reaction, called "Stevens-Johnson's syndrome."
- Peripheral neuropathy: in the form of numbness, tingling and pain in the feet or hands. This side effect does not appear to be related to dose or length of time on thalidomide. If symptoms develop, evaluation takes place as to whether drug should be stopped. Symptoms often improve after drug is stopped, but may not resolve completely.
- Constipation

These are less common side effects of patients receiving thalidomide:

- Low white blood cell count
- Dizziness when changing position (from sitting to standing). May be accompanied by slow heart rate, weakness, and feeling faint.
- Swelling of the feet or ankles

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)
- 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 an emergency. Contact your health care provider ***within 24 hours*** of noticing any of the following:

- Extreme fatigue (unable to carry on self-care activities)
- Constipation unrelieved by laxative use
- New skin rashes
- Numbness or tingling of your hands or feet
- Swelling of the feet or ankles. Sudden weight gain
- Signs of infection such as redness or swelling, pain on swallowing, coughing up mucous, or painful urination
- Unable to eat or drink for 24 hours or have signs of dehydration: tiredness, thirst, dry mouth, dark and decrease amount of urine, or dizziness

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