

Interferon

Interferon is a protein that interferes with the viral activity of cells and helps to boost your immune system. This medicine is used to treat many types of cancer and non-cancerous diseases.

How Is It Given?

- clear liquid by IV (intravenous)
- by muscle injection (intramuscular injection)
- by injection just under the skin (subcutaneous injection).

What Side Effects May Occur?

This is a partial list of the side effects you may have with this medicine. You may have some, all or none of those listed, or you may have other side effects not listed. Most side effects last only a short time.

Common:

- flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, headache, fatigue, muscle aches starting 3 to 6 hours after treatment
- mild nausea (feel like throwing up)
- loss of appetite, weight loss
- diarrhea (loose stools)
- joint pain
- dizziness
- irritability, poor concentration, hallucinations, paranoia
- mild liver damage

Less common:

- confusion, depression
- numb hands and feet
- chest pain
- rapid heartbeat
- swollen feet or ankles
- cough
- dry or itchy skin, rash
- facial flushing
- dry mouth and throat
- thirst
- hair thinning
- lowered white blood cell and platelet counts
- impotence or decreased sexual drive
- irregular menstrual cycles

Special Notes

- You may have flu-like symptoms at the start of your Interferon treatment. Over time your body will get used to the medicine. Talk with your doctor or nurse for ways to help manage these side effects.
- You or a family member may be able to give the shots at home. If you are going to do this, follow instructions carefully.

- Some medicines interact with Interferon. Let your doctor know if you are taking any of the following:
 - antihistamines such as:
 - diphenhydramine (Bendaryl®)
 - chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton®)
 - astemizole (Hismanal®)
 - loratadine (Claritin®)
 - fexofenadine (Allegra®)
 - cetirizine (Zyrtec®)
 - sedatives such as:
 - phenobarbital
 - butabarbital (Butisol®),
 - amobarbital (Amytal®)
 - theophylline
 - tranquilizers such as:
 - diazepam (Valium®)
 - chlordiazepoxide (Librium®)
 - zidovudine (Retrovir®, AZT).
- You may have changes in your menstrual cycle or sperm count. Discuss birth control measures with your doctor. You should not get pregnant or father a child while taking this medicine.

When To Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor if you have:

- irregular or rapid heartbeat
- chest pain
- unusual bleeding or bruising
- unexplained fever
- numb or tingling hands or feet
- swollen feet or ankles
- yellowing of your skin or eyes
- nausea or vomiting you cannot control.

Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you want more complete medicine information or if you have questions.