

Patient Treatment Information

AC followed by Paclitaxel + Trastuzumab

Your chemotherapy treatment is called AC followed by paclitaxel + trastuzumab. It is commonly used to treat breast cancer and has also been used to treat other diseases. This treatment is made up of four drugs:

- doxorubicin (dox-oh-ROO-bi-sin) or Adriamycin® (a-dree-a-MY-sin)
- cyclophosphamide (sy-e-kloe-FOSS-fa-mide) or Cytosan® (sy-e-TOX-an)
- paclitaxel (PAK-li-tax-el) or Taxol® (TAX-all)
- trastuzumab (tras-TOO-ze-mab) or Herceptin® (her-SEP-tin)

Doxorubicin, cyclophosphamide and paclitaxel prevent cancer cells from dividing and growing, and can eventually cause the cancer cells to shrink and die. Trastuzumab is a new type of drug, called a monoclonal antibody, which targets cancer cells more precisely than chemotherapy drugs.

What Do I Need to Know Before Starting Treatment?

Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about any prescription or over-the-counter products you are taking, including dietary supplements, vitamins, herbal medicines and homeopathic remedies.

Use an effective birth control method while you are taking these drugs. Chemotherapy drugs can cause harm to a fetus, so be sure to tell your healthcare provider right away if you or your partner become pregnant.

Avoid breastfeeding during treatment. It is not known if these drugs pass into breast milk.

Some chemotherapy drugs can cause sterility. Talk with your healthcare provider about your options if you want to have children in the future.

Do not get any immunizations or vaccinations while taking chemotherapy drugs without the approval of your healthcare provider.

What Do I Need to Know Before Starting AC Followed by Paclitaxel + Trastuzumab?

The drugs in this treatment can cause heart problems, such as an irregular heartbeat and sometimes heart failure. These heart problems can affect your heart for months or years after your treatment ends. Heart damage is more common in those who already have heart disease. Your risk of heart damage increases as your total dose of doxorubicin increases. Using trastuzumab after AC further increases your risk of heart damage. Tell your healthcare provider if you have heart disease or if you have ever received chemotherapy or radiation therapy to the chest. Call your healthcare provider immediately if you have back pain, flushing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, increased cough, swelling of the feet or ankles or a rapid or irregular heartbeat while taking any of these drugs. Sometimes an irregular heartbeat can require a pacemaker.

Doxorubicin and paclitaxel can cause irritation if they accidentally leak out of the vein. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you feel pain, burning or swelling around the injection site during your treatment.

Doxorubicin can cause urine, tears or sweat to turn red for one to two days after treatment. The red color is caused by the medicine and is not harmful.

In rare cases, this treatment can cause secondary cancers or leukemia years after treatment.

Cyclophosphamide can cause delayed wound healing.

Cyclophosphamide can cause bleeding in the bladder. Talk with your healthcare provider about drinking extra fluids and emptying your bladder frequently to reduce the risk of this side effect. Call your healthcare provider right away if you have painful, frequent or difficult urination or blood in the urine.

Paclitaxel and trastuzumab can cause allergic reactions. Tell your healthcare provider immediately if you have itching, trouble breathing, dizziness, fainting or swelling of the lips, throat or tongue.

Trastuzumab commonly causes a mild to moderate infusion reaction with the first treatment. The symptoms usually occur during treatment or within 24 hours of treatment. The most common symptoms are chills and fever, but can also include nausea, vomiting, headache, dizziness, shortness of breath and pain.

Trastuzumab can cause lung problems. Call your healthcare provider immediately if you have trouble breathing.

In rare cases, the allergic reactions and lung problems caused by your treatment can be severe and life-threatening.

Your treatment can interact with other medicines, including:

- Ketoconazole (Nizoral®), fluconazole (Diflucan®) or itraconazole (Sporanox®)
- Cimetidine (Tagamet®)
- Digoxin (Lanoxin®) or quinidine
- St. John's wort
- Phenytoin (Dilantin®), phenobarbital (Luminal®) or carbamazepine (Tegretol®)
- Rifabutin (Mycobutin®) or rifampin (Rifadin®)
- Verapamil (Verelan®, Calan®, Isoptin® or Covera-HS®) or diltiazem (Cardizem®)
- Cyclosporin (Sandimmune®)
- Tretinoin
- Amprenavir (Agenerase®), atazanavir (Reyataz®), indinavir (Crixivan®), nelfinavir (Viracept®), ritonavir (Norvir®), saquinavir (Invirase®) or delavirdine (Rescriptor®)

Please note this list is a summary and does not contain all possible drug interactions. Contact your healthcare provider if you are taking any medications that can interact with your treatment.

You should not take this treatment if you are allergic to doxorubicin; cyclophosphamide; paclitaxel; other drugs that contain Cremophor EL® (polyoxyethylated castor oil), such as cyclosporine or teniposide; trastuzumab; Chinese hamster ovary cell proteins or any other component of these drugs. Tell your healthcare provider if you are allergic to benzyl alcohol. You can still take trastuzumab, but it will have to be mixed differently.

How Is the Treatment Given?

Your healthcare provider will give you your treatment by injection into a vein. The dose you receive will be based on your weight and height. Your healthcare provider will determine the number of treatments you receive. You will receive the AC portion of the treatment first, and once it is completed, you will receive the paclitaxel + trastuzumab.

You may be given medicines to help prevent and control nausea and vomiting before you receive your treatment. These medicines may be given either by mouth or by injection into a vein.

If you are given any medicine to take at home, do not share it with others. Sharing this medication with anyone else could be harmful.

When Should I Call My Healthcare Provider?

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Shaking chills or fever of 100.5 degrees F or higher
- Unusual bleeding, easy bruising or pinpoint red spots on your skin
- Vomiting that is severe or lasts several hours
- Painful or frequent urination or blood in your urine
- Diarrhea that causes an additional four bowel movements a day, diarrhea that lasts more than one day, diarrhea at night or diarrhea with fever, cramps or bloody stools
- Irregular or rapid heart beat, chest pain, chest tightness or shortness of breath
- Dizziness or feeling lightheaded
- Inability to eat or weight loss

What Are the Possible Side Effects?

All drugs can cause side effects, but every person reacts differently to each drug. The following chart lists the possible side effects that can occur with your treatment, how to recognize and minimize symptoms and possible treatments. The side effects are grouped by how often the side effect occurs: Common (occurs in more than 25 percent of patients), Less Common (occurs in 5 to 25 percent of patients) or Rare (occurs in less than 5 percent of patients). Because the AC and paclitaxel + trastuzumab portions of treatment are given separately, the side effects for each are noted separately when they are different.

Side Effect	How to Minimize Side Effect	Possible Treatments
<p>Risk of Infection (Common)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever and chills • Painful urination • Sore throat and cough • Nasal congestion • Swelling or redness of the skin at the site of a wound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often. • Brush and floss your teeth daily. • Clean cuts right away with warm water, soap and antiseptic. • When your white blood cell count is low, stay away from crowds and people with colds or other illnesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be given medicine to increase your white blood cell count. • You may be given an antibiotic to treat or prevent infection. • Your healthcare provider may decrease your chemotherapy dose or delay further chemotherapy.
<p>Nausea/Vomiting (Common. Symptoms are generally mild to moderate, but can be severe with AC.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling queasy or sick to your stomach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat small, frequent meals and bland foods—such as bananas, rice, applesauce and toast. • Eat food cold or at room temperature so the smell of food will not bother you. • Avoid fried, spicy or fatty foods. • Eat and drink slowly. • Drink plenty of liquids during the day, but to avoid bloating, drink small amounts of liquid during meals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will be given medicine to help reduce nausea and vomiting.
<p>Mouth Sores and Pain (Common with AC. Less common with paclitaxel + trastuzumab. Symptoms are generally mild.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain, swelling and redness of the mouth, tongue and throat • “Coated tongue” • Difficulty talking, swallowing or eating • Bleeding ulcers and infection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brush teeth two to four times a day using a soft bristle brush and fluoride toothpaste. • Use non-waxed dental floss daily. • Ask your healthcare provider to recommend a mouthwash that does not contain alcohol. • Sip water during the day and use sugar-free candy or chewing gum to keep your mouth wet. • Eat food cold or at room temperature. • Eat soft or pureed food. • Avoid food that is acidic, spicy, salty, dry or rough, such as toast. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be given medicine to help treat pain. • You may be given medicine to treat fungal or viral infections.
<p>Diarrhea (Common with paclitaxel + trastuzumab. Less common with AC. Symptoms are generally mild.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loose or watery stools several times a day • Abdominal cramping, gas and bloating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat small, frequent meals and bland foods—such as bananas, rice, applesauce and toast. • Avoid caffeine; alcohol; raw fruits and vegetables; raw eggs; undercooked meats; spicy, fatty and greasy foods; milk and dairy products; foods that cause gas, such as beans and other legumes; high fiber and high-fat foods; foods left un-refrigerated for more than two hours (one hour for egg dishes and cream or mayonnaise-based foods); bulk laxatives; and stool softeners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink eight to ten glasses of clear liquids every day. • Your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine to help treat diarrhea.
<p>Alopecia or Hair Loss (Common. Usually causes complete hair loss.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than normal amount of hair loss in your brush, in the shower or on your pillow after sleeping • Loss of body hair 	<p>Alopecia cannot be prevented but here are tips to help with hair loss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a soft hairbrush. Do not use brush rollers, color treat your hair or get a permanent. • Avoid daily hair washing, use a mild shampoo and avoid using a hairdryer, or use a low setting if you must use one. • Have your hair cut short; this will make it look fuller. • Your insurance might cover a wig. If you would like a wig, ask your healthcare provider for a prescription for a "hair prosthesis". Your hair color and style can be better matched if you shop for a wig before losing a lot of hair. • Use sunscreen or wear a hat or scarf to protect your scalp from the sun. 	

Side Effect	How to Minimize Side Effect	Possible Treatments
Rash (Common. Symptoms are generally mild.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually mild and short-lived • Generally appears on the arms and trunk (occasionally on the face) • May be itchy • May appear as a flat, discolored area on the skin or as a small raised bump 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid prolonged exposure to heat. • Use creams or moisturizers regularly. Try wearing cotton gloves on your hands. • Avoid using perfume, cologne or aftershave since these products can be irritating to the skin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your healthcare provider may prescribe creams (mild steroids, antihistamines or antibiotics) to help treat the rash. • The rash may improve on its own without any treatment.
Neuropathy (Common with paclitaxel + trastuzumab. Symptoms are generally mild to moderate. Rare with AC.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbness or tingling feeling in the hands or feet • Muscle cramps • Loss of balance • Difficulty buttoning buttons or picking up objects • Decreased awareness of heat or cold in fingertips and toes • Difficulty hearing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to avoid the cold or extreme heat. • Wear mittens or gloves, socks and scarves. • If your fingers are numb, be careful with sharp objects. • Beware of hot coffee mugs, pots and pans and dishwasher—you may not feel the heat until you are burned. • If you feel unsteady, be careful on stairs and in the shower. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your healthcare provider may decrease your chemotherapy dose or delay further chemotherapy.
Anorexia or Appetite Loss (Less Common. Weight loss is generally minimal.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not having an appetite • Feeling too nauseated to eat • Metallic or medicinal taste • Change in taste causing dislike for certain foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try eating six to eight small meals or snacks each day instead of three larger meals. • Vary your diet and try new foods and recipes. • Take a walk before meals, when possible. This may make you feel hungrier. • Eat with friends or family. When eating alone, listen to the radio or watch TV. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook dinners ahead of time and freeze them in small portions so that cooking smells are minimized. • Let others help with food, but ask that foods be prepared in small portions that can be frozen. And don't hesitate to let them know which foods to avoid. • Add mild spices to change flavor. • It might be helpful to have a program, such as Meals on Wheels, deliver food to you.
Nail Changes (Less Common) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Darkening of the nails that usually grows out with the nail • Vertical or horizontal bands on the nails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trim nails often and keep them clean. • Wear gloves for cleaning and gardening to minimize damage and prevent infection. • Don't wear nail polish or false fingernails until the nails have grown out and returned to normal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be given an antibiotic if there is an infection in the nail bed.
Anemia (Rare) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue or weakness • Dizziness • Pale skin • Feeling out of breath • Feeling cold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan rest periods throughout the day. • Organize daily activities so that you conserve your energy. • Try to eat a well balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids. • Stand up slowly to avoid getting dizzy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be given medicine to increase your red blood cell count. • Your healthcare provider may decrease your chemotherapy dose or delay further chemotherapy.
Bleeding (Rare) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unusual bleeding, easy bruising • Black or tar-like stools • Blood in your urine • Pinpoint red spots on your skin • Bleeding gums or nosebleeds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid aspirin and aspirin-like drugs, such as ibuprofen. • Use caution with sharp objects, such as razors and nail cutters. • Avoid activities that can cause cuts, bumps and bruises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be given medicine to increase your platelet count. • Your healthcare provider may need to decrease the dose or delay further chemotherapy.
Radiation Recall (Rare) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redness, tenderness or swelling on areas of the skin that have previously been treated with radiation • May include wet sores, peeling skin or discoloration after the skin has healed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay out of the sun and avoid tanning beds. • If you are in the sun, wear protective clothing and use sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be given a corticosteroid to reduce swelling.

