

Patient Treatment Information

AMIFOSTINE

Your treatment is called amifostine (am-i-FOS-teen) or Ethyol (e-THYE-ohl). Amifostine helps reduce some of the side effects of radiation and chemotherapy treatment. It is used to:

- Reduce the severity of xerostomia (zee-roh-STOH-mee-ah) caused by radiation treatment for head and neck cancer. Patients with xerostomia do not produce enough saliva and have symptoms such as dry mouth, cracked lips, thick saliva, increased thirst, changes in taste and problems with swallowing or talking. Xerostomia can be temporary or permanent.
- Reduce and prevent mucositis (myoo-koe-SYE-tis), the swelling, irritation and ulceration of the lining of the digestive tract in lung, pelvic and head and neck cancer patients receiving radiation treatment.

What Do I Need to Know Before Starting Treatment with Amifostine?

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.

Avoid breastfeeding during treatment. It is not known if amifostine passes into breast milk.

Tell your healthcare provider if you are taking medicine for blood pressure. Your healthcare provider might change the dose or the dosing schedule of your blood pressure medicine while you are being treated with amifostine.

Dehydration can worsen the side effects of amifostine. Your healthcare provider may give you intravenous fluids (injection into a vein) or have you drink extra fluids to prevent dehydration. If you are asked to drink extra fluids, drink at least four (8-oz.) cups of water, sports drink or other decaffeinated, non-alcoholic clear liquid beginning 24 hours before each treatment. Then drink an additional two (8-oz.) cups of fluids 30 minutes before treatment.

You should not take this treatment if you are allergic to amifostine, have low blood pressure or are dehydrated.

How Is Amifostine Given?

Your healthcare provider will give you amifostine by injection under the skin or into a vein. Amifostine is usually given 15 to 30 minutes before radiation or chemotherapy.

What Are the Important Side Effects?

Low blood pressure is a common side effect of amifostine. Your healthcare provider will monitor your blood pressure closely during treatment. If you develop low blood pressure, you will be given intravenous fluids to increase your blood pressure. If you feel dizzy or lightheaded during treatment, tell your healthcare provider right away.

Amifostine frequently causes nausea and vomiting. Your healthcare provider will give you medicine before your treatment to help prevent and control nausea and vomiting. If you are given an oral medicine, take it one to two hours before your scheduled treatment, or as directed. Tell your healthcare provider if you experience increased nausea or are unable to eat or drink fluids after treatment.

Amifostine can cause allergic skin reactions. Check your injection site each evening and tell your healthcare provider if you have a rash, pain at the injection site or a fever. Severe allergic skin reactions are rare.

