

# ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY EDUCATION



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## MELPHALAN

### Name of your medication

Generic name — melphalan (MEL-fuh-lan)

Brand name — Alkeran® (AL-keh-ran)

### Approved uses

Melphalan is used to treat multiple myeloma (MM) and ovarian cancer.

### Dose and schedule

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Taking melphalan as instructed is important to allow your treatment to be as effective as possible, so here are some key points to remember.

- Your dose is based on many factors, including your height and weight, overall health and diagnosis.
- Melphalan should be taken on an empty stomach (at least 1 hour before or 2 hours after a meal or snack), but at the same time each day.
- Melphalan should be taken whole and not crushed, cut, or dissolved. If you are unable to swallow melphalan, talk to your care provider or pharmacist for possible options.
- If you miss a dose of melphalan, **do not** take an extra dose or two doses at one time. Simply take your next dose at the regularly scheduled time. Be sure to write down if you miss a dose and let your care provider know about any missed doses.

### Storage and handling

Handle melphalan with care. Just like when chemotherapy is given into the vein, this drug can be toxic, and exposure of the drug to others should be limited.

- Store melphalan in the refrigerator (36°F–46°F) in a dry location protected from light.
- Keep melphalan out of reach of children and pets.
- Leave melphalan in the provided packaging until it is ready to be taken.
- Whenever possible, you should give melphalan to yourself and follow the steps below. If a family member, friend, or caregiver needs to give the melphalan to you, they also need to follow these steps:
  1. Wash hands with soap and water.
  2. Put on gloves to avoid touching the medication. (Gloves are not necessary if you give the drug to yourself.)
  3. Gently transfer the melphalan from its package to a small medicine or other disposable cup.
  4. Administer the medicine immediately by mouth with water.
  5. Remove gloves and do not use them for anything else.
  6. Throw gloves and medicine cup in household trash.
  7. Wash hands with soap and water.
- A daily pill box or pill reminder is not recommended to be used with melphalan.

# ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY EDUCATION



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## MELPHALAN

- ❑ If you have any unused melphalan, **do not** throw it in the trash and **do not** flush it down the sink or toilet. Talk to your care provider or pharmacist about proper disposal of melphalan.
- ❑ If you are traveling, put your melphalan in a sealed plastic bag. Ask your pharmacist if any additional travel precautions are needed.

### Handling body fluids and waste

Since melphalan remains in your body for several days after it is taken, some of the drug may be present in urine, stool, sweat, or vomit. Once you have started to take melphalan, it is important to know the following instructions every day for as long as your treatment lasts. This is to keep yourself, loved ones, and the environment as safe as possible.

- ❑ Pregnant women should avoid touching anything that may be soiled with body fluids from the patient.
- ❑ Toilet and septic systems
  - You may use the same toilet, septic tank, and/or sewer that you usually use. If you have a low-flow toilet, close the lid and flush twice to ensure all waste has been discarded.
  - If the toilet or toilet seat becomes soiled with urine, stool, or vomit, clean the surfaces before other people use the toilet.
  - Wash hands with soap and water after using the toilet.
- ❑ If you need a bedpan, be sure your caregiver knows to wear gloves to assist with cleanup and to wash the bedpan with soap and water every day.
- ❑ If you do not have good control of bladder or bowels, use a disposable pad with a plastic back, a diaper, or a sheet to absorb body waste.
- ❑ Wash any skin that has been exposed to body waste or melphalan with soap and water.
- ❑ Linens or clothing that are soiled with body fluids or body waste should be washed separately from other linens and clothing. If you do not have a washer, place the soiled linens in a plastic bag until they can be washed.
- ❑ Wash hands with soap and water after touching linens or clothing that may be soiled with body fluids.

### Drug and food interactions

- ❑ Melphalan has many drug interactions, please inform your care providers of all prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal products.
- ❑ Melphalan should be taken on an empty stomach (at least 1 hour before or 2 hours after a meal or snack).
- ❑ Talk with your care provider or pharmacist before taking new medications or supplements, or receiving any vaccines.
- ❑ Avoid live vaccines during treatment with melphalan.

### Serious side effects of melphalan

- ❑ Bone marrow suppression is a decrease in the number of white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets, and can be a severe side effect of melphalan. Speak to your care provider to know when you need to have laboratory tests done to monitor your blood cell counts.
- ❑ Secondary malignancy is the growth of a cancer months or years after treatment. This is a rare but possible side effect of treatment with melphalan.

# ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY EDUCATION



## MELPHALAN

### Side Effects of Melphalan

The common side effects that have been known to happen in more than 30% of patients taking melphalan are listed in the left side of this table. You **MAY NOT** experience these side effects. Options to help manage any side effects that do occur are included on the right side of this table. These should be discussed with your care provider. If you experience any side effect you cannot manage or that is not listed here, contact your care provider.

Possible Side Effect	Management
<p><b>Decreased white blood cells (WBCs) and increased risk for infection</b></p>	<p>Your WBCs should be monitored by a simple blood test. When your WBCs are low, you are at a greater risk of having an infection. Take the following precautions to protect yourself from infection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wash your hands often, especially before eating and after using the bathroom.</li> <li>• Avoid crowds and people with fevers, flu, or other infection.</li> <li>• Bathe regularly to keep good personal hygiene.</li> </ul> <p>Contact your care provider if you experience any signs or symptoms of an infection such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever (temperature more than 100.4°F or 38°C)</li> <li>• Chills</li> <li>• Sore throat</li> <li>• Burning with urination</li> <li>• Unusual tiredness</li> <li>• A sore that becomes red, is draining, or does not heal</li> </ul> <p>Check with your care provider before taking any medicine for a fever or chills.</p>
<p><b>Decreased platelet count and increased risk of bleeding</b></p>	<p>Your platelets should be monitored by a simple blood test. When they are low, you may bruise or bleed more easily than usual.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use caution to avoid bruises, cuts, or burns.</li> <li>• Blow your nose gently, and do not pick your nose.</li> <li>• Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush, and maintain good oral hygiene.</li> <li>• When shaving, use an electronic razor instead of razor blades.</li> <li>• Use a nail file instead of nail clippers.</li> </ul> <p>Call your care provider if you have bleeding that won't stop. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A bloody nose that bleeds for more than 5 minutes despite pressure</li> <li>• A cut that continues to ooze despite pressure</li> <li>• Gums that bleed excessively when you floss or brush</li> </ul> <p>Seek medical help immediately if you experience any severe headaches, observe blood in your urine or stool, cough up blood, or experience prolonged and uncontrollable bleeding.</p> <p><b>You may need to take a break or hold your medication for medical or dental procedures. Talk to your care provider or dentist before any scheduled procedures.</b></p>

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# ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY EDUCATION



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## MELPHALAN

Possible Side Effect	Management
<b>Decreased hemoglobin, part of the red blood cells that carry iron and oxygen</b>	<p>Your hemoglobin should be monitored by a simple blood test. When your hemoglobin is low, you may notice that you get tired or fatigued more easily.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try to get 7–8 hours of sleep per night.</li><li>• Avoid operating heavy machinery if you feel too tired.</li><li>• Find a balance between work and rest.</li><li>• Stay as active as possible, but know that it is okay to rest as needed.</li><li>• You might notice that you are more pale than usual.</li></ul> <p>Let your care provider know right away if you experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shortness of breath</li><li>• Dizziness</li><li>• Palpitations</li></ul>
<b>Nausea or vomiting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eat and drink slowly.</li><li>• Drink 8–10 glasses of water or fluid each day unless your care provider has instructed you to limit your fluid intake.</li><li>• Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day rather than a few large meals.</li><li>• Eat bland foods. Avoid spicy, fried, and greasy foods.</li><li>• Avoid vigorous exercise immediately after eating.</li><li>• Don't lie down immediately after eating.</li><li>• Avoid strong odors.</li></ul> <p>Let your provider know if you experience nausea or vomiting. Your provider may prescribe medication to help with the nausea or vomiting.</p>

If you experience ANY uncontrolled side effect, call your physician or healthcare center immediately:

**(INSTITUTIONAL CONTACT INFO)**

### Pregnancy, sexual activity, and contraception

- Women should not become pregnant and men should not get a partner pregnant while taking melphalan. Men and women of childbearing age and potential should use effective contraception during therapy and for a minimum of 1 month after the last dose of melphalan.
- Do not breastfeed while taking melphalan and for 1 month after the last dose of melphalan.
- Please inform your care provider if you become pregnant.
- It is safe to hug and kiss. Special precautions may be needed for sexual activity while on oral chemotherapy, and you are encouraged to ask your care provider.

# ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY EDUCATION



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## MELPHALAN

### Obtaining medication

Talk with your care provider about the process for obtaining your melphalan.

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### Additional resources

**Product prescribing information:** [https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda\\_docs/label/2011/014691s029lbl.pdf](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2011/014691s029lbl.pdf)

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### Additional instructions

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**Important notice:** The Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC), Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy Association (HOPA), National Community Oncology Dispensing Association, Inc. (NCODA), and Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) have collaborated in gathering information for and developing this patient education guide. This guide represents a brief summary of the medication derived from information provided by the drug manufacturer and other resources. This guide does not cover all existing information related to the possible uses, directions, doses, precautions, warnings, interactions, adverse effects, or risks associated with this medication and should not substitute for the advice of a qualified healthcare professional. Provision of this guide is for informational purposes only and does not constitute or imply endorsement, recommendation, or favoring of this medication by ACCC, HOPA, NCODA, or ONS, who assume no liability for and cannot ensure the accuracy of the information presented. The collaborators are not making any representations with respect to the medications whatsoever, and any and all decisions, with respect to such medications, are at the sole risk of the individual consuming the medication. All decisions related to taking this medication should be made with the guidance and under the direction of a qualified healthcare professional.

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