

# ORAL CANCER TREATMENT EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS  
NCODA.ORG



## SUNITINIB MALATE

### Name of your medication

Generic name — sunitinib malate (soo-NIH-tih-nib MA layt)  
Brand name — Sutent® (SOO-tent)

### Common uses

Sunitinib is used to treat patients with gastrointestinal stromal tumor (GIST), advanced renal cell carcinoma (RCC), and progressive, well-differentiated pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors (pNET).

Sunitinib may also be used for other treatments.

### Dose and schedule

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

- Your dose may vary, but the usual dose of sunitinib is:
  - 50 milligrams (50 mg) to be taken by mouth at a scheduled time once a day for 4 weeks on treatment followed by 2 weeks off for GIST and RCC.
  - 37.5 milligrams (37.5 mg) to be taken by mouth at a scheduled time once a day continuously without a scheduled off-treatment period for pNET.
- Sunitinib can be taken with or without food, but at the same time each day.
- Sunitinib should be taken whole and not crushed, cut, or dissolved. If you are unable to swallow sunitinib, talk to your care provider or pharmacist for possible options.
- If you miss a dose of sunitinib,
  - Only take the missed dose if it has been less than 12 hours since you were supposed to take it. Then, take the next dose at the regularly scheduled time.
  - Do not take two doses at one time.
  - Be sure to write down if you miss a dose, and let your care provider know about any missed doses.
- If you need to have surgery, tell your care provider you are taking sunitinib. Sunitinib may need to be stopped until your wound heals after some surgeries.

### Drug and food interactions

- Sunitinib has many drug interactions. Inform your care providers of all prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal products.
- Grapefruit or grapefruit juice may interact with sunitinib; avoid eating or drinking these during treatment with sunitinib.
- Talk with your care team or pharmacist before taking new medications or supplements, or receiving any vaccines.

# ORAL CANCER TREATMENT EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS  
NCODA.ORG



## SUNITINIB MALATE

### Storage and handling

Handle sunitinib 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 sunitinib at room temperature (68°F–77°F) in a dry location away from light.
- Keep sunitinib out of reach of children and pets.
- Leave sunitinib in the provided packaging until it is ready to be taken.
- Whenever possible, give sunitinib to yourself and follow the steps below. If a family member, friend, or caregiver needs to give sunitinib 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 sunitinib 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.
- If a daily pill box or pill reminder will be used, contact your care team before using:
  - The person filling the box or reminder should wear gloves (gloves are not necessary if you are filling the box or reminder).
  - When empty, the box or reminder should be washed with soap and water before refilling. Be sure to wash hands with soap and water after the task is complete, whether or not gloves are worn
- If you have any unused sunitinib, **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 sunitinib.
- If you are traveling, put your sunitinib's packaging in a sealed plastic bag. Ask your pharmacist if any additional travel precautions are needed.

# ORAL CANCER TREATMENT EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS  
NCODA.ORG



## SUNITINIB MALATE

### Side Effects of Sunitinib

Below are common side effects that have been known to happen in about one third or more of patients taking sunitinib are listed on 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 hemoglobin, part of the red blood cells that carry iron and oxygen</b></p>	<p>Your hemoglobin should be monitored using a 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 healthcare provider know right away if you experience any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortness of breath</li> <li>• Dizziness</li> <li>• Palpitations</li> </ul>
<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:</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>

*Continued on the next page*

# ORAL CANCER TREATMENT EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS  
NCODA.ORG



## SUNITINIB MALATE

Possible Side Effect	Management
<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 the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A bloody nose that bleeds for more than five 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>
<p><b>Changes in liver function</b></p>	<p>Your liver function will be checked periodically by a simple blood test. Contact your care provider if you notice any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yellowing of the skin or whites of your eyes</li> <li>• Dark or brown urine</li> <li>• Bleeding or bruising</li> </ul>
<p><b>Changes in kidney function</b></p>	<p>Your kidney (renal) function should be checked periodically by a simple blood test. Contact your care provider if you notice any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased amount of urination</li> <li>• Unusual swelling in your legs and feet</li> </ul>

*Continued on the next page*

# ORAL CANCER TREATMENT EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS  
NCODA.ORG



## SUNITINIB MALATE

Possible Side Effect	Management
<p><b>Changes in electrolytes and other laboratory values</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High or low glucose levels</li> <li>• High amylase or lipase levels</li> <li>• High creatinine kinase levels</li> <li>• High uric acid levels</li> <li>• High or low calcium levels</li> <li>• High or low phosphate levels</li> <li>• Low albumin levels</li> </ul>	<p>Changes in some laboratory values may occur and should be monitored by a simple blood test.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may not feel any symptoms if the changes are mild, and they usually are not a sign of a serious problem.</li> <li>• More severe changes may occur, which can be a sign of a serious problem.</li> </ul> <p>Notify your care provider if you have any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortness of breath</li> <li>• Chest discomfort</li> <li>• Weakness or fatigue</li> <li>• New aches and pains</li> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• Dizziness</li> <li>• Swelling of your legs or feet</li> <li>• Red- or brown-colored urine</li> </ul>
<p><b>Diarrhea (loose and/or urgent bowel movements)</b></p>	<p>Monitor how many bowel movements you have each day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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, low-fiber foods (e.g., bananas, applesauce, potatoes, chicken, rice, toast).</li> <li>• Avoid high-fiber foods (e.g., raw vegetables, raw fruits, whole grains).</li> <li>• Avoid foods that cause gas (e.g., broccoli, beans).</li> <li>• Avoid lactose-containing foods (e.g., yogurt, milk).</li> <li>• Avoid spicy, fried, and greasy foods.</li> </ul> <p>Contact your provider if any of the following occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of bowel movements you have in a day increases by four or more.</li> <li>• You feel dizzy or lightheaded.</li> </ul> <p>Your care provider may recommend an over-the-counter medication called loperamide (Imodium®) to help with your diarrhea, but talk to your care provider before starting this medication.</p>
<p><b>Fatigue</b></p>	<p>You may be more tired than usual or have less energy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stay as active as possible, but know it is okay to rest as needed.</li> <li>• Try to do some activity every day.</li> <li>• Plan your activities, and do them at a time of day when you feel a bit more energetic.</li> <li>• Avoid operating heavy machinery if you feel too tired.</li> </ul>

*Continued on the next page*

# ORAL CANCER TREATMENT EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS  
NCODA.ORG



## SUNITINIB MALATE

Possible Side Effect	Management
<p><b>Nausea or vomiting</b></p>	<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 that can help.</p>
<p><b>Mouth irritation or sores</b></p>	<p>Practice good mouth care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rinse your mouth frequently.</li> <li>• Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush or cotton swab after meals.</li> <li>• Use a mild nonalcohol mouth rinse at least 4 times a day (after eating and at bedtime). One example is a mixture of 1/8 teaspoon of salt and 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda in 8 ounces of warm (not hot) water.</li> <li>• If you have sores in your mouth, avoid using tobacco products, alcohol, and mouthwashes that contain alcohol.</li> </ul> <p>Call your care provider if you experience pain or sores in your mouth or throat.</p>
<p><b>Decreased appetite or weight loss</b></p>	<p>Talk to your care provider if you notice a sudden decrease in weight while taking this medication.</p> <p>When you do not feel like eating, try the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat small frequent meals instead of 3 large meals each day.</li> <li>• Keep snacks nearby so you can eat when you feel hungry.</li> <li>• Take liquid nutritional supplements.</li> <li>• Drink 8–10 glasses of water or fluid each day, especially if you are not eating, unless your care provider has instructed you to limit your fluid intake.</li> </ul>

*Continued on the next page*

# ORAL CANCER TREATMENT EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS  
NCODA.ORG



## SUNITINIB MALATE

Possible Side Effect	Management
<b>Taste changes</b>	<p>Some people experience a metallic or bitter taste in their mouth. To help with taste changes, try the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose and prepare foods that look and smell good to you.</li> <li>• Use plastic utensils if food tastes like metal.</li> <li>• Flavor foods with spices to change taste.</li> <li>• Suck on mints or chew gum to mask taste.</li> <li>• Brush teeth with a soft bristle toothbrush before and after eating.</li> <li>• Avoid smoking.</li> </ul> <p>Notify your doctor if you are having trouble eating or are losing weight.</p>
<b>Increased blood pressure</b>	<p>Routinely take your blood pressure. Record your blood pressure in a journal/diary and report these to your physician. Contact your healthcare provider for high blood pressure or if the following symptoms occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Dizziness</li> <li>• Chest pain</li> <li>• Shortness of breath</li> <li>• Fluid retention, weight gain, or swelling</li> </ul>
<b>Heartburn</b>	<p>Some people experience a burning discomfort in their stomach. To help with heartburn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid smoking.</li> <li>• Limit your caffeine intake.</li> <li>• Elevate the head of your bed while sleeping or lying down.</li> <li>• Do not eat within 1 hour before going to bed.</li> <li>• Avoid foods that are fatty, caffeinated, alcoholic, or citrus.</li> </ul> <p>If the heartburn bothers you, ask your provider what you may use to help with the discomfort.</p>
<b>Skin and hair color changes</b>	<p>Changes to your skin and hair color may occur during treatment. They may both look yellow or get lighter in color. Usually they return to normal after treatment.</p>
<b>Abdominal pain</b>	<p>Abdominal pain/discomfort may occur. Report any serious pain or symptoms to your care provider immediately.</p>
<b>Pain or discomfort in hands and/or feet</b>	<p>Hand-foot syndrome (HFS) is a skin reaction that appears on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It can appear as a rash, peeling skin, or a “pins and needles” sensation. Let your care provider know right away if you experience this side effect. To prevent HFS, you can do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep your hands and feet moisturized.</li> <li>• Avoid hot showers or baths that may dry out the skin.</li> <li>• Avoid tight-fitting shoes or socks.</li> </ul>

*Continued on the next page*

# ORAL CANCER TREATMENT EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS  
NCODA.ORG



## SUNITINIB MALATE

Possible Side Effect	Management
<b>Muscle or joint pain or weakness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep a diary of your pain including a description of when and where the pain is occurring, what it feels like, and how long it lasts.</li><li>• Stay as active as possible, but know that it is okay to rest as needed, too.</li><li>• Tell your care provider if pain interferes with your activity.</li><li>• If the pain or weakness bothers you, ask your provider what you may use to help with this discomfort. Take only pain medication that has been prescribed or recommended by your care provider.</li></ul>

### Serious side effects of sunitinib

- ❑ Seek medical attention right away if you have any chest pain or tightness.
- ❑ Be aware of changes in the electrical activity of your heart, called QT prolongation. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you feel faint, lightheaded, or dizzy, or if you feel your heart beating irregularly or fast, while taking sunitinib.
- ❑ Sunitinib may be harmful to your thyroid. Speak to your care provider to know when you need to have laboratory tests done to monitor your thyroid function. Your doctor may prescribe medication to keep your thyroid functioning properly.
- ❑ If possible, avoid major dental procedures while taking sunitinib as it can cause bone damage in the jaw. Consider dental work prior to starting treatment.
- ❑ Some patients taking sunitinib have experienced tumor lysis syndrome when starting treatment. Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check for this side effect.
- ❑ A condition called reversible posterior leukoencephalopathy syndrome can occur while taking sunitinib. Call your healthcare provider immediately if you have headaches, seizures, confusion, or changes in vision.
- ❑ Sunitinib can cause cuts or wounds to heal more slowly. Tell your care team if you have a wound that doesn't heal properly. Also tell your care team if you have planned surgery or dental procedure, as sunitinib should be stopped prior to your surgery. Your doctor may restart sunitinib after your surgical wound has healed.
- ❑ Sunitinib can increase your risk of having a blood clot which may be harmful to your kidneys. Speak to your care team to know when you need to have blood tests to monitor your kidneys. Contact your care team if you notice swelling in your legs and feet or decreased amount of urination.
- ❑ Rarely, sunitinib can cause severe skin reactions, including Stevens-Johnson syndrome, which can be life-threatening. Seek emergency care if you have a severe rash or a rash on your mouth, eyes, or genitals.

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

(INSTITUTIONAL CONTACT INFO)



# ORAL CANCER TREATMENT EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS  
NCODA.ORG



## SUNITINIB MALATE

### Handling body fluids and waste

Because sunitinib 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 sunitinib, it is important to follow the instructions below 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 sunitinib 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.

### Pregnancy, sexual activity, and contraception

- Women should not become pregnant and men should not get a partner pregnant while taking sunitinib.
- Women of childbearing age and potential should use effective contraception during therapy and for a minimum of 1 month after the last dose of sunitinib.
- Men with female partners of reproductive potential should use effective contraception during therapy and for a minimum of 7 weeks after the last dose of sunitinib.
- Effective contraception could include 1 or more of the following: oral contraceptive, barrier methods, etc.
- Do not breastfeed while taking sunitinib and for 1 month after the last dose of sunitinib.
- 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.

### Obtaining medication

- Talk with your care provider about the process for obtaining your sunitinib.

\_\_\_\_\_ (PHARMACY OR SPECIALTY PHARMACY CONTACT INFO)

# ORAL CANCER TREATMENT EDUCATION



PASSION FOR PATIENTS  
NCODA.ORG



## SUNITINIB MALATE

### Additional resources

**Product website:** [www.sutent.com](http://www.sutent.com)

**Product prescribing information:** <http://labeling.pfizer.com/showlabeling.aspx?id=607>

**Product resources:** [www.sutent.com/help-paying-for-sutent](http://www.sutent.com/help-paying-for-sutent)

**Updated – November 10, 2023**

### Additional instructions

---

---

---

---

---

**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.

**Permission:** Oral Cancer Treatment Education (OCE) sheets are provided as a free educational resource for patients with cancer in need of concise, easy-to-understand information about oral cancer drugs. Healthcare providers are permitted to copy and distribute the sheets to patients as well as direct patients to the OCE website for information. However, commercial reproduction or reuse, as well as rebranding or reposting of any type, are strictly prohibited without permission of the copyright holder. Please email permission requests and licensing inquiries to [Contact@NCODA.org](mailto:Contact@NCODA.org).

Copyright © 2023 by Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy Association. All rights reserved.