Asparaginase (a SPEAR a ji nase)  
Patient Education

US Brand Names: *E. coli* Asparaginase; *Erwinia* Asparaginase; L- Asparaginase  
Therapeutic Category: chemotherapy

**What is this medicine used for?**  
Used to treat a variety of cancers.

**How does it work?**  
Asparaginase works by killing rapidly growing cells. This drug will affect all fast growing cells, cancer cells and normal cells, in your body.

**What should my doctor or nurse know before I take this medication?**

- If you are allergic to any medicines.
- If you are taking other over-the-counter or prescription medicines, including vitamins and herbal remedies.
- If you are, or may be pregnant.
- If you are breast feeding.

**How is this drug given?**

- This medicine can be used alone or in combination with other cancer medicine.
- This medicine is given into a vein, injected under the skin. Ask your doctor or nurse how you will be taking this medication.

**What are the general precautions when taking this medicine?**

- Talk with your doctor or nurse before taking aspirin, aspirin-containing products, over-the-counter or prescription medications, including vitamins and herbal remedies.
- Drink 8 to 10 glasses of non-caffeinated liquid every day (unless told otherwise by your doctor or nurse).
- If you or your partner can get pregnant, use birth control during your treatment. Once completing treatment, discuss the timing for discontinuing birth control measures with your provider. (See Patient Teaching Sheet: Fertility)
What are the common side effects of this medicine?

- Allergic Reaction: Fever, chills, rash, breathing difficulty. The risk for this reaction is higher if the drug is given in your vein and as you receive more doses over time.
- Fatigue.
- Bleeding and clotting problems (coagulopathy).
- Pancreatitis which causes abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, and yellow coloring to the skin and whites of the eyes.

Danger signals to report immediately to your doctor or nurse:

- Signs or symptoms of infection. This includes a fever of 100.4 F (38 C) or greater, chills, severe sore throat, ear or sinus pain, cough, increased sputum or change in color, painful urination, mouth sores, wound that will not heal, or anal itching or pain.
- Severe nausea or vomiting or diarrhea not controlled by medication.
- Not able to eat or drink.
- Swelling or pain in your leg or arm.
- Severe headache.
- Bleeding from your nose, mouth, gums, or in your urine or bowel movements. Bruising that does not heal.
- Feeling extremely tired, weak, dizzy or light headed.
- Go to your nearest emergency room for signs of a life-threatening reaction: wheezing, chest tightness, fever, itching, bad cough, blue skin color, seizures, or swelling of face, lips, tongue or throat.

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