Idarubicin (eye da ROO bi sin)
Patient Education

US Brand Names: Idamycin
Therapeutic Category: chemotherapy

What is this medicine used for?
Used to treat cancer. More specifically this particular drug is used to treat acute leukemias (AML, ANLL, ALL), accelerated phase or blast crisis of chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML) and breast cancer.

How does it work?
Idarubicin 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.
- If you have heart disease.
- If you have liver problems.

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.

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?
• Heart damage: there is a recommended maximum cumulative dose of this drug. Heart
damage can occur when this dose is reached.
• Nausea and vomiting: take anti-nausea medication as directed. Call for nausea and
vomiting not controlled by prescribed medication and/or inability to eat and drink liquids.
(See Patient Teaching Sheet: Nausea and Vomiting)
• May cause alopecia: this medication may make your hair fallout. Hair loss starts about 2-3
weeks after you get this drug. Hair on your head is often lost first, but body hair can thin.
Hair re-growth takes about 3-5 months after your last dose of this medication. (See
Patient Teaching Sheet: Alopecia)
• Myelosuppression (drop in number of blood cells)
  May cause a drop in the number of white blood cells in your body (Neutropenia). These
cells fight infection. A drop in the number of these cells puts you at risk for infection. You
may be at an increased risk for getting an infection during your treatment. Talk to your
doctor or nurse about your risk. Avoid people with infections, colds or flu when you are at
risk. (See Patient Teaching Sheet: Neutropenia)

May cause a drop in the number of platelets in your body (Thrombocytopenia). Platelets
help your blood clot. A drop in platelets put you at risk for bleeding. You may bleed easily
during your treatment. Talk to your doctor or nurse about your risk. Avoid injury to your
skin and mucous membranes by using a soft toothbrush, electric razor, etc., when you are
at risk. (See Patient Teaching Sheet: Thrombocytopenia)

May cause a drop in the number of your red blood cells in your body (Anemia). Red blood
cells carry oxygen throughout your body. This drop in red blood cells may lead to you
feeling tired/fatigued. Talk to your doctor or nurse about your risk. (See Patient Teaching
Sheet: Fatigue)

VESICANT: This drug will cause tissue damage if it leaks out of your vein. If you feel
pain in or around the vein into which the drug is being administered, tell the nurse
IMMEDIATELY.

Danger signals to report immediately to your doctor or nurse:

• Signs or symptoms of infection. This include 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.
• 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.
• Develop swelling in your hands or feet and/or shortness of breath.

Prepared by the Oncology Nursing Committee 10/04.
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