

# ***ADRIAMYCIN***

## ***(ALSO CALLED DOXORUBICIN)***

**What it Does:** This chemotherapy drug interferes with cancer cell growth by damaging the building blocks of the cell (DNA or RNA) so that the cancer cells cannot continue to grow and multiply. Chemotherapy affects normal cells in the body as well as cancer cells. This is why certain side effects occur. Normal cells repair themselves faster than cancer cells; therefore, most of the side effects diminish over time when the drug is not being administered.

**How it is Given:** Adriamycin is given intravenously (by injection into a vein in the arm or port-a-cath). If Adriamycin accidentally leaks out of the vein, it may damage the skin. Tell the nurse immediately if you notice burning, stinging, redness, pain, or swelling at the IV site.

### **Possible Side Effects and What to do About Them:**

#### **Nausea and Vomiting:**

- Take prescribed medication as needed for any nausea and vomiting that may occur.
- When nauseated, sip on small amounts at a time of clear liquids such as ginger-ale, broth, or eat Jello, Popsicles, etc. Dry crackers, toast, and popcorn may also help reduce nausea.
- Avoid fatty, highly salted, or spicy foods

**Low Blood Counts:** Adriamycin may cause bone marrow depression (your blood counts to drop.) Your doctor will notify you if your blood counts are low. Call your physician/nurse if you develop:

- Fever of 101 or higher and/or chills
- Any nose or gum bleeding
- Blood in your stool or urine
- Excessive bruising
- Cough or sore throat

**Red Urine:** This drug may cause a reddish color in your urine that may last for 1-2 days after you receive it – no action necessary – this is NOT blood.

**Hair Loss:** It is very likely that Adriamycin will cause hair loss. If hair loss occurs, hair growth will begin 1-2 months after treatment is complete. In some cases, the hair will start to grow back while you are still on treatment.

- You may want to purchase a wig before your hair loss occurs in order to match your color and style. (Some insurance companies will cover the cost of a wig.)
- Turbans, hats, and scarves are quite helpful to protect the scalp.

**Effects on Heart:** Although it is rare, Adriamycin can cause changes in your heart.

- A baseline assessment of your heart will be ordered before you receive this medication and periodically
- Notify your physician if you develop any shortness of breath, swelling in feet or legs, or heart palpitations.

**Sore Mouth:** If you develop any sore or ulcers in your mouth, notify your physician or nurse for a prescription mouthwash. Do not use a commercial mouthwash – most of them contain alcohol, which may cause further irritation.

- Keep your mouth clean; use a soft bristle toothbrush and rinse your mouth after meals and at bedtime with salt water (1 tsp. of salt in 1 qt. of water) or 1 tsp. of baking soda in 8 oz. water
- If you wear dentures, remove them if your gums are sore and irritated
- Keep lips moistened with Vaseline
- Avoid hot, spicy foods as well as acidic foods and juices - cool foods seem to be more soothing
- Avoid use of alcohol and tobacco

**Skin Reactions:** If you have previously received Radiation Therapy, Adriamycin may cause skin irritation and redness in the areas that have been treated. Notify your nurse or physician if you should develop these skin reactions.