

The content on the UpToDate website is not intended nor recommended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your own physician or other qualified health care professional regarding any medical questions or conditions. The use of UpToDate content is governed by the [UpToDate Terms of Use](#). ©2017 UpToDate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Irinotecan (conventional): Patient drug information

Copyright 1978-2017 Lexicomp, Inc. All rights reserved.

(For additional information [see "Irinotecan \(conventional\): Drug information"](#) and [see "Irinotecan \(conventional\): Pediatric drug information"](#))

Brand Names: US Camptosar

Brand Names: Canada Camptosar; Irinotecan For Injection; Irinotecan Hydrochloride Injection; Irinotecan Hydrochloride Trihydrate For Injection; Irinotecan Hydrochloride Trihydrate Injection

Warning

- Diarrhea can happen with this drug. Diarrhea may happen early (within 24 hours) or later (after 24 hours) after getting this drug. Most of the time, early diarrhea goes away and is not severe. Early diarrhea may happen with signs like runny nose, flushing, tearing, stomach cramps, more saliva, sweating, or slow heartbeat. Late diarrhea may lead to some health problems like dehydration, infection, or electrolyte problems and can be life-threatening. Talk with your doctor about what to do if you have diarrhea. Call your doctor right away the first time you have diarrhea, if you have very bad diarrhea, or if you are not able to get diarrhea under control within 24 hours. Call your doctor right away if you have black or bloody stools, signs of dehydration, or if you are not able to take fluids by mouth.
- The ability of your bone marrow to make blood cells may be lowered. This can lead to very bad bleeding problems or infections. Tell your doctor right away if you have signs of infection like fever, chills, or sore throat; any bruising or bleeding; or if you feel very tired or weak.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat colorectal cancer.
- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you have an allergy to irinotecan or any other part of this drug.
- If you are allergic to any drugs like this one, any other drugs, foods, or other substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had, like rash; hives; itching; shortness of breath; wheezing; cough; swelling of face, lips, tongue, or throat; or any other signs.

- If you are on dialysis, talk with your doctor.
- If you are breast-feeding or plan to breast-feed.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert or have clear eyesight until you see how this drug affects you.
- You may have more chance of getting an infection. Some infections have been deadly. Wash hands often. Stay away from people with infections, colds, or flu.
- You may bleed more easily. Be careful and avoid injury. Use a soft toothbrush and an electric razor.
- Have blood work checked as you have been told by the doctor. Talk with the doctor.
- If you have upset stomach, throwing up, loose stools (diarrhea), or are not hungry, talk with your doctor. There may be ways to lower these side effects.
- Talk with your doctor before getting any vaccines. Use with this drug may either raise the chance of an infection or make the vaccine not work as well.
- This drug may irritate the vein. It may burn the skin if the drug leaks from the vein when it is given. Tell your nurse if you have any redness, burning, pain, swelling, or leaking of fluid where the drug is going into your body.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.
- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if you take it while you are pregnant.
- Use birth control that you can trust to prevent pregnancy while taking this drug.
- If you are pregnant or you get pregnant while taking this drug, call your doctor right away.

What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

WARNING/CAUTION: Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Signs of infection like fever, chills, very bad sore throat, ear or sinus pain, cough, more sputum or change in color of sputum, pain with passing urine, mouth sores, or wound that will not heal.
- Signs of fluid and electrolyte problems like mood changes, confusion, muscle pain or weakness, a heartbeat that does not feel normal, very bad dizziness or passing out, fast heartbeat, more thirst, seizures, feeling very tired or weak, not hungry, unable to pass urine or change in the amount of urine produced, dry mouth, dry eyes, or very bad upset stomach or throwing up.
- Signs of kidney problems like unable to pass urine, change in how much urine is passed, blood in the

urine, or a big weight gain.

- Signs of bleeding like throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds; coughing up blood; blood in the urine; black, red, or tarry stools; bleeding from the gums; vaginal bleeding that is not normal; bruises without a reason or that get bigger; or any bleeding that is very bad or that you cannot stop.
- Feeling very tired or weak.
- Very bad dizziness or passing out.
- Redness or irritation of the palms of hands or soles of feet.
- Very bad and sometimes deadly lung problems have happened with this drug. Call your doctor right away if you have lung or breathing problems like trouble breathing, shortness of breath, or a cough that is new or worse.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Dizziness.
- Not able to sleep.
- Headache.
- Mouth irritation or mouth sores.
- Upset stomach or throwing up.
- Belly pain.
- Not hungry.
- Hard stools (constipation).
- Hair loss.
- Feeling tired or weak.
- Back pain.
- Sweating a lot.
- Weight loss.
- Gas.
- Feeling sleepy.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

- It is given as an infusion into a vein over a period of time.
- Other drugs may be given before this drug to help avoid side effects.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Call your doctor to find out what to do.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

- If you need to store this drug at home, talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about how to store it.

General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Keep a list of all your drugs (prescription, natural products, vitamins, OTC) with you. Give this list to your doctor.
- Talk with the doctor before starting any new drug, including prescription or OTC, natural products, or vitamins.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Check with your pharmacist about how to throw out unused drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

Use of UpToDate is subject to the [Subscription and License Agreement](#).