



Provincial Health Services Authority

**For the Patient:** Imatinib  
Other names: GLEEVEC®

- **Imatinib** (i-MAT-in-ib) is a drug that is used to treat blood cancer (e.g., leukemia) and other types of cancer. It is a tablet that you take by mouth.
- **Blood tests** will be taken. The dose of your imatinib may be changed based on the test results and/or other side effects.
- It is important to **take** imatinib exactly as directed by your doctor. Make sure you understand the directions.
- **Take** imatinib with food.
- If you are taking imatinib **once** a day and **miss a dose**, take it as soon as you can if it is within 12 hours of the missed dose. If you are taking imatinib **twice** a day, take it as soon as you can if it is within 6 hours of the missed dose. Otherwise, skip the missed dose and go back to your usual dosing times. Let your doctor know about the missed dose.
- If you **vomit** after taking imatinib, do not take a second dose. Call your doctor during office hours for advice.
- Other drugs such as ketoconazole (NIZORAL®), simvastatin (ZOCOR®), rifampin, and warfarin (COUMADIN®) may **interact** with imatinib. Tell your doctor if you are taking these or any other drugs as you may need extra blood tests or your dose may need to be changed. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any new drugs.
- **Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice** for the duration of your treatment, as these may interact with imatinib.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of imatinib.
- **Imatinib may affect fertility in men. If you plan to have children, discuss this with your doctor before being treated with imatinib.**
- Imatinib may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with imatinib. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.

- **Store** imatinib tablets out of the reach of children, at room temperature, away from heat, light and moisture.
- **Tell** doctors or dentists that you are being treated with imatinib before you receive any treatment from them.

### Changes in blood counts

Imatinib may cause temporary changes in your blood counts. Your doctor will be following these changes carefully by performing blood tests. Adjustment of your treatment may be needed in certain circumstances.

BLOOD COUNTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Normal white blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. <b>When they are low, you are at greater risk of having an infection.</b></p>	<p>To help prevent infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wash your hands often and always after using the bathroom.</li> <li>• Avoid crowds and people who are sick.</li> <li>• Call your doctor <b>immediately</b> at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.</li> </ul>
<p>Normal platelets help your blood to clot normally after an injury (e.g., cut). <b>When the platelet count is low, you may be more likely to bruise or bleed.</b></p>	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try not to bruise, cut, or burn yourself.</li> <li>• Clean your nose by blowing gently. Do not pick your nose.</li> <li>• Avoid constipation.</li> <li>• Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily.</li> </ul> <p>Some medications such as ASA (e.g., ASPIRIN®) or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) may increase your risk of bleeding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., <b>ASA for your heart</b>).</li> <li>• For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) first, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable.</li> </ul>

Side effects are listed in the following table in the order in which they may occur. Tips to help manage the side effects are included.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<b>Nausea and vomiting</b> may sometimes occur.	You may be given a prescription for antinausea drug(s) to take at home. It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred, so follow directions closely. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink plenty of liquids.</li> <li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in <i>Practical Tips to Manage Nausea</i>.*</li> </ul>
<b>Diarrhea</b> may occur.	To help diarrhea: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink plenty of liquids.</li> <li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li> <li>• Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in <i>Food Choices to Help Manage Diarrhea</i>.*</li> </ul>
<b>Skin rashes</b> may occur.	To help itching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can use calamine lotion.</li> <li>• If very irritating, call your doctor during office hours.</li> <li>• Otherwise make sure to mention it at you next visit.</li> </ul>
Your <b>skin may sunburn</b> easily.	Refer to <i>Your Medication Sun Sensitivity and Sunscreens*</i> or the <i>BC Health Guide</i> for more information. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After sun exposure, if you have a severe sunburn or skin reaction such as itching, rash, or swelling, contact your doctor.</li> </ul>
<b>Headache</b> may occur.	Take acetaminophen (e.g., <b>TYLENOL®</b> ) every 4-6 hours if needed, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day. If more than the occasional use is needed, check with your doctor.
<b>Swelling</b> around your eyes, in your feet or lower legs may occur if your body retains extra fluid.	Contact your doctor if you experience a rapid unexplained weight gain. If swelling in your feet or lower legs is a problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevate your feet when sitting.</li> <li>• Avoid tight clothing.</li> </ul>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<b>Tiredness</b> and lack of energy may occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you are feeling tired.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in <i>Fatigue/Tiredness – Patient Handout</i> OR <i>Your Bank to Energy Savings: Helping People with Cancer Handle Fatigue</i>.*</li> <li>• <b>Tell your doctor if this continues to bother you.</b></li> </ul>

\*Please ask your chemotherapy nurse or pharmacist for a copy.

### STOP TAKING IMATINIB AND SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer); chills; cough; pain or burning when you pass urine.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black, tarry stools; blood in urine; pinpoint red spots on skin.
- Signs of serious **fluid retention** such as an **unexpected rapid weight gain**.
- Signs of an **allergic reaction** (rare) soon after a dose including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling or breathing problems.

### SEE YOUR DOCTOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of **heart problems** such as shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, swelling of feet or lower legs.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Signs of **kidney problems** such as lower back or side pain, swelling of feet or lower legs.

### CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONTINUE OR BOTHER YOU:

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting or diarrhea.
- Easy bruising or bleeding.
- Skin rash or itching.
- Muscle cramps or pain or joint aches.

### REPORT ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS TO YOUR DOCTOR