



Does your intravenous chemotherapy contain alcohol?

You are receiving this leaflet because you have been prescribed intravenous chemotherapy that contains a form of alcohol. Systemic anti-cancer therapy (SACT) is cancer treatment whereby medicines are used to try and kill the cancer. SACT is available in various formulations. The Intravenous formulation is prepared within a sterile environment at the Pharmacy Aseptic Unit and delivered to the Anti-cancer therapy Units where it is administered. In addition to the active ingredient, many products contain extra ingredients as part of the formulation. These generally help to provide consistency, keep the medication stable for long periods of time and can also help with medication delivery to the cancer site.

Ethanol is used as an ingredient in some SACT formulations which helps the active ingredient dissolve in the formulation. Ethanol is type of alcohol that may give you some side effects. The alcohol content can vary depending on the dose prescribed and the manufacturer of the product. Evidence of actual increase of ethanol-blood levels is limited due to various rates of alcohol clearance amongst the differing population. Clearance of alcohol is dependent on weight, sex, age, metabolism, food intake, other medication and liver function and therefore it is difficult to be specific on its effect on individual people. Units are a simple way of expressing the quantity of pure alcohol in a solution. 1 unit of alcohol is equivalent to 8000mg of pure ethanol. This is the average amount of alcohol an adult can process within one hour.

The below table provides an example of anti-cancer drugs that contain alcohol, with average doses and alcohol units (this is not an exhaustive list, speak to your pharmacist).

Drug	Example Dose	Units of Alcohol
Cabazitaxel	48mg	0.12 units
Carmustine	72mg	0.21 units
Docetaxel	136mg	0.34 units
Eribulin	2.2mg	0.02 units
Etoposide	180mg	0.29 units
Gemcitabine	1800mg	0.99 units
Paclitaxel	144mg	1.17 units

If you already have problems with alcoholism, liver disorders or are taking any medicines that could potentially interact; please speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. You are also advised not to drive or use machines soon after the chemotherapy treatment has been given and to inform staff of any ethanol related effects. These can vary between individuals, however common effects that may occur but are not limited to the following; fluctuating levels of alertness, agitation, nausea, vomiting and mood swings.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

My religion does not allow me to ingest alcohol. What are my options?

It is important that you speak with your consultant oncologist if you have a strong opinion about this. However, the use of alcohol for medicinal purposes is usually acceptable within many religious backgrounds. The hospital chaplaincy service can also provide some support with this.

Information for Patients

I am taking several medicines for other medical conditions. Who will be able to go through my medicines to ensure that they are suitable?

A Pharmacist or Pharmacy Technician will check your medical records when you are starting the SACT and will ensure that the doses prescribed are accurate and also check for potential drug interactions. If you would like to speak to a Pharmacist or Pharmacy Technician directly, they are available without an appointment in the Cancer Centre and Anti-Cancer Therapy Units. .

What if I feel 'drunk' or 'intoxicated' whilst receiving my SACT?

There are various reasons why you may feel this way. Sometimes it may not be the SACT but a side effect of other pre-medication that you are receiving. Speak to the nurse looking after you immediately. If it is SACT related, it may be that the rate of infusion of your SACT can be reduced which will mean that the treatment time may be increased.

Would it still be fine for me to drive following SACT that contains alcohol?

It is not advised to drive following SACT that contains alcohol; as you may be above the legal drink drive limit and especially if you feel drowsy.

How would I know if I am above the alcohol limit to be able to drive?

There are various methods that legal authorities use to measure if you are above the drink drive limit. It is impossible to say how many units would breach the limit as each person is different. The level of alcohol can be measured in the blood, urine or breath. There are strict drink driving penalties in the UK if you are caught over the limit; and therefore we advise all patients not to drive following SACT.

Contact Details:

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Oncology Treatment Suite Day Unit: **0121 371 7317**

Pharmacy Oncology Team: **0121 371 2599**

CCH

Centre for Clinical Haematology Day Unit: **0121 371 7822**

Pharmacy Haematology Team: **0121 371 7841**

Heartlands Hospital

Haematology and Oncology Day Unit: **0121 424 0763**

Pharmacy Haematology/Oncology Team: **0121 424 3172**

Good Hope Hospital

Haematology and Oncology Day Unit: **0121 424 9640**

Pharmacy Haematology/Oncology Team: **0121 424 7935**

Solihull Hospital

Haematology and Oncology Day Unit: **0121 424 5047**

Pharmacy Haematology/Oncology Team: **0121 424 5491**

Pharmacy

University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk.