

View this article online at: [patient.info/medicine/erlotinib-tablets-tarceva](https://patient.info/medicine/erlotinib-tablets-tarceva)

## Erlotinib tablets (Tarceva)

Erlotinib is given for the treatment of lung cancer, or for the treatment of cancer of the pancreas. It is taken once a day.

You will need to have regular check-ups so it is important that you keep your appointments with your doctor and/or hospital.

Contact your doctor straightaway if you develop any of the following: severe or persistent diarrhoea, eye irritation, or sudden difficulties with your breathing (especially if you also have a cough and/or a high temperature).

### About erlotinib

Type of medicine	A tyrosine kinase inhibitor chemotherapy medicine
Used for	Lung cancer, and cancer of the pancreas
Also called	Tarceva®
Available as	Tablets

Erlotinib is a medicine which is given for the treatment of [lung cancer](#) and [pancreatic cancer](#). You may be prescribed it alongside other medicines for cancer.

In cancer, certain cells in the body grow and multiply in a way that is 'out of control'. [Chemotherapy \(anti-cancer\) medicines](#) work by inhibiting the way the cells grow and increase in number. Erlotinib works by blocking chemical messengers which send signals to cells to grow. This in turn stops the cancer cells from growing and increasing in number.

## Before taking erlotinib

Some medicines are not suitable for people with certain conditions, and sometimes a medicine may only be used if extra care is taken. For these reasons, before you start taking erlotinib it is important that your doctor knows:

- If you have an infection or feel particularly unwell.
- If you have any problems with the way your liver works or with the way your kidneys work.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- If you are taking or using any other medicines. This includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines.
- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine.

## How to take erlotinib tablets

- Before you start the treatment, read any printed information you have been given by your doctor and the printed manufacturer's leaflet from inside the pack of tablets. These will give you more information about erlotinib and will provide a full list of the side-effects which you may experience from taking it.
- Erlotinib will be prescribed for you by a specialist doctor who is experienced in treating your condition. Erlotinib is taken once daily. There are several strengths of tablet available - your doctor will tell you what strength of tablet is right for you. It is important that you take the tablets exactly as you are told to. The directions for taking the tablets will be printed on the label of the pack to remind you, but if you are still unsure about what to do, or if you have any other concerns, you should contact your doctor or hospital clinic for advice.
- Take erlotinib at the same time of day each day, as this will help you to remember to take your doses regularly. You should take the tablets when your stomach is empty, which means taking them one hour before any food, or waiting until two hours afterwards.

- If you forget to take a dose at your usual time, take it as soon as you remember. If you do not remember until the following day, take the dose that is due but do not take the forgotten dose. Let your doctor know that you have missed a dose.

## Getting the most from your treatment

- You must try to keep your regular appointments with your doctor or hospital. This is so your doctor can check on your progress. You will need to have regular check-ups during treatment. If at any time you develop a dry cough, a high temperature, or a sudden problem with your breathing, you must let your doctor know about it straightaway so that it can be investigated.
- Smoking can reduce the effectiveness of the treatment, as it lowers the amount of erlotinib in your body. If you are a smoker you should try to quit, but make sure you tell your doctor about stopping.
- If you buy or take any other medicines, check with a pharmacist that they are suitable to take alongside erlotinib. You should not take antacids or other preparations for indigestion, as these can reduce the effectiveness of erlotinib.
- If you are having an operation or dental treatment, always tell the person carrying out the treatment which medicines you are taking.
- It is important that you do not get pregnant or father a child while you are taking erlotinib. If relevant, make sure you discuss with your doctor which types of contraception are suitable for you and your partner.

## Can erlotinib cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, most medicines can cause unwanted side-effects although not everyone experiences them. The table below contains some of the most common ones associated with erlotinib. You will find a full list in the manufacturer's information leaflet supplied with your medicine. The unwanted effects often improve as your body adjusts to the new medicine, but speak with your doctor or pharmacist if any of the following continue or become troublesome.

<b>Very common erlotinib side-effects (these affect more than 1 in 10 people)</b>	<b>What can I do if I experience this?</b>
Diarrhoea	Drink plenty of water. If this continues or becomes severe, you should let your doctor know
Feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting), abdominal discomfort, indigestion (reflux), wind (flatulence)	Stick to simple meals - avoid rich or spicy foods
Feeling tired	Do not drive and do not use tools or machines unless you feel well enough
Problems with eyesight, cough, sudden problems with breathing, high temperature, infections	Speak with your doctor <b>as soon as possible</b>
Weight loss, sore mouth, itchy skin rash, mood changes, headache, loss of hair, tingling or numbness in your hands or feet	If any become troublesome, speak with your doctor

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to the tablets, ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

## How to store erlotinib

- Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.
- Store in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light.
- Please return any unused or unwanted tablets to your clinic or pharmacy to destroy.

# Important information about all medicines

Never take more than the prescribed dose. If you suspect that you or someone else might have taken an overdose of this medicine, go to the accident and emergency department of your local hospital. Take the container with you, even if it is empty.

This medicine is for you. Never give it to other people even if their condition appears to be the same as yours.

Do not keep out-of-date or unwanted medicines. Take them to your local pharmacy which will dispose of them for you.

If you have any questions about this medicine ask your pharmacist.

---

If you experience side effects, you can report them online through the [Yellow Card website](#).

---

## Further reading

- [Manufacturer's PIL, Tarceva® 25 mg, 100 mg and 150 mg Film-Coated Tablets](#); Roche Products Limited, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated November 2022.
- [Medicines Complete BNF 87th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.

**Disclaimer:** This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Egton Medical Information Systems Limited has used all reasonable care in compiling the information but makes no warranty as to its accuracy. Consult a doctor or other healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. For details see our [conditions](#).

Authored by:	Peer Reviewed by: Sid Dajani	
Originally Published: 20/11/2023	Next review date: 19/06/2023	Document ID: doc_28851

---

View this article online at: [patient.info/medicine/erlotinib-tablets-tarceva](https://patient.info/medicine/erlotinib-tablets-tarceva)

Discuss Erlotinib tablets (Tarceva) and find more trusted resources at [Patient](https://www.patientaccess.com).

---



To find out more visit [www.patientaccess.com](https://www.patientaccess.com)  
or download the app



Follow us

