

View this article online at: patient.info/medicine/gefitinib-tablets-iressa

Gefitinib tablets (Iressa)

Gefitinib is given for lung cancer. 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 suddenly feel short of breath, if you develop a cough or an infection, or if your eyes become irritated.

About gefitinib

Type of medicine	A tyrosine kinase inhibitor chemotherapy medicine
Used for	Treatment of lung cancer
Also called	Iressa®
Available as	Tablets

Gefitinib is a medicine which is given to treat some types of [lung 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 cells grow and increase in number. Gefitinib belongs to a group of anti-cancer medicines known as tyrosine kinase inhibitors. These medicines work by blocking chemical messengers (called tyrosine kinases) which send signals to cells to grow. This stops cancer cells from growing and spreading.

Before taking gefitinib

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 gefitinib 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 if you have ever had hepatitis B infection.
- If you have any problems 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 gefitinib 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 gefitinib and will provide a full list of the side-effects which you may experience from taking it.
- Gefitinib will be prescribed for you by a specialist doctor who is experienced in treating your condition. The usual dose is one tablet daily. It is important that you take the tablets exactly as you are told to by your doctor. 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.
- Try to take your tablet at the same time of day each day, as this will help you to remember to take your doses regularly. You can take it before or after meals.

- You can swallow the tablet with a drink of water, or if you prefer, you can mix the tablet into a glass of water. To do this, gently stir the tablet into half a glassful of water and allow it to dissolve completely – this may take about 20 minutes. Drink the contents of the glass as soon as the tablet has dissolved, and then add some more water to your glass and drink this too.
- If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you do not remember until the following day, do not take the forgotten dose, as you should not take two doses on the same day.

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.
- If you buy or take any other medicines, check with a pharmacist that they are suitable to take alongside gefitinib. You should not take any preparations which contain St John's wort (a herbal remedy used for low moods), as it can reduce the effectiveness of gefitinib.
- 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 while you are taking gefitinib. If relevant, make sure you discuss with your doctor which types of contraception are suitable for you and your partner.

Can gefitinib 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 gefitinib. 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.

Very common gefitinib side-effects (these may affect more than 1 in 10 people)	What can I do if I experience this?
Diarrhoea	Drink plenty of water. If this continues or becomes severe, you should let your doctor know
Feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting)	Stick to simple meals – avoid rich or spicy foods
Feeling tired or weak	Do not drive and do not use tools or machines unless you feel well enough
Sore or dry mouth	Ask your doctor or pharmacist to recommend a suitable remedy
Problems with eyesight, cough, sudden problems with breathing, high temperature, infections	Speak with your doctor as soon as possible
Loss of weight, lack of appetite, nosebleeds and other bleeding, itchy skin rash, nail problems, hair loss	If any become troublesome, speak with your doctor
Changes to some blood tests	Your doctor will regularly check for these

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 gefitinib

- 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, Iressa® 250 mg film-coated tablets](#); AstraZeneca UK Limited, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated October 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: 04/07/2023	Document ID: doc_28853

View this article online at: patient.info/medicine/gefitinib-tablets-iressa

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



To find out more visit www.patientaccess.com
or download the app



Follow us

