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Idarubicin capsules (Zavedos)

Swallow idarubicin capsules whole with a drink of water – do not bite, chew or suck the capsules.

Idarubicin may colour your urine red. This is nothing to worry about and will disappear after a day or two.

Keep your regular appointments with your doctor or hospital. You will need to have frequent blood tests and check-ups.

The most common side-effects are diarrhoea, feeling sick (nausea), sore mouth, and an increased risk of infection.

About idarubicin

Type of medicine	An anthracycline chemotherapy medicine
Used for	Treatment of leukaemia and breast cancer
Also called	Zavedos®
Available as	Capsules and injection

Idarubicin is used to treat some cancers. It is given in particular to treat [leukaemia](#), which is cancer of white blood cells. It is also given for [breast cancer](#) if other treatments have not proved effective. It can be used alone or alongside other medicines for the treatment of cancer.

In cancer, certain cells in the body grow and multiply too fast. **Chemotherapy (anti-cancer) medicines** like idarubicin work by preventing the growth and division of cells, and this reduces the number of cancer cells your body makes. Idarubicin is usually given as an injection but it can also be taken by mouth in the form of capsules. This leaflet provides information about idarubicin capsules.

Before taking idarubicin

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 idarubicin it is important that your doctor or pharmacist knows:

- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- If you have any problems with the way your liver works, or with the way your kidneys work.
- If you have an infection or feel unwell.
- If you have a heart condition, such as if you have had a heart attack in the past or if you have an unusual heartbeat.
- 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 idarubicin

- Before you start this treatment, read any printed information you have been given by your doctor and the printed manufacturer's leaflet from inside your pack of capsules. These will give you more information about idarubicin and will provide a full list of side-effects which you may experience from taking it.

- Idarubicin will be given to you by a specialist doctor who is experienced in treating your condition. Your doctor will calculate what dose is right for you and will tell you how many capsules to take each day – it is important that you take idarubicin exactly as you are told to. Your dose will also be printed on the label of your pack. If you are unsure about what to do, or if you have any other concerns, you should contact your doctor or hospital clinic for advice.
- Swallow the capsules whole with a drink of water. Do not open or chew the capsules. Try to take idarubicin at the same time each day, as this will help you to remember to take your doses. You can take the capsules before food, or after a light meal if preferred.
- Your doctor will tell you how long your course of treatment will last. For some people this can just be a single dose; for others it can be a three-day course of treatment. You may or may not be asked to repeat the course of treatment after a few weeks.
- If you are sick shortly after taking a dose, or if you forget a dose, contact your doctor or clinic for advice on what to do. You will be told whether to take the dose again, or wait until the next dose is due.

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 blood tests and check-ups during treatment.
- Idarubicin lowers the number of white cells in your blood, increasing the chance of you getting an infection. You should take certain precautions to reduce the risk of infection – if possible, avoid people with infections and let your doctor know if you think you are getting a sore throat or if you have a high temperature.
- Idarubicin may colour your urine red. There is no need to be concerned about this as it will go after a day or so. A few people taking idarubicin have noticed that their skin and nails have become discoloured too, although this occurs less often than the colour change to urine.

- It is important that you do not get pregnant or father a child while you are taking idarubicin. Make sure you have discussed with your doctor which types of contraception are suitable for you and your partner. To prevent pregnancy, women should use effective contraception for at least six months after finishing treatment. Men should continue to use contraception for three months after finishing treatment.
- While you are taking idarubicin and for a while after you stop treatment, do not have any immunisations (vaccinations) without talking to your doctor first. Idarubicin lowers your body's resistance so there is a chance that you may get an infection from some vaccines.
- If you are having an operation or dental treatment, tell the person carrying out the treatment which medicines you are taking.

Can idarubicin cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, most medicines can cause side-effects although not everyone experiences them. Before you start treatment with idarubicin, your doctor will discuss with you the possibility of unwanted side-effects occurring. The table below contains some of the most common ones. You will find a full list of side-effects in the manufacturer's information leaflet supplied with your capsules.

Very common idarubicin side-effects (these affect more than 1 in 10 people)	What can I do if I experience this?
Diarrhoea	Drink plenty of water to replace lost fluids. If this continues, speak with your doctor
Feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting)	Stick to simple foods. Let your doctor know about this, as an anti-sickness medicine may help
Sore mouth or mouth ulcers	Brushing your teeth 2-3 times a day with a soft toothbrush and regularly using a mouth rinse may help to prevent this. If mouth ulcers become a problem, speak with your doctor
A high temperature (fever), or symptoms of an infection	Let your doctor know about this straightaway
Headache, tummy (abdominal) pain, chills, hair loss, lack of appetite, rash	Speak with your doctor or clinic for advice
Other common side-effects include anaemia, bleeding, heart problems, and reduced numbers of blood cells	Your doctor will check for these

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to the capsules, speak with your doctor or pharmacist.

How to store idarubicin

- Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.
- Store in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light.

- Return any unused or unwanted capsules to your clinic or pharmacy to destroy. They will need special disposal.
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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, Zavedos® Capsules 5 mg and 10 mg](#); Pfizer Limited, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated November 2021.
- [Medicines Complete BNF 87th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.

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