



Vinblastine (Velban®, Alkaban AQ)

Pronounce: vin-BLAS-teen

Classification: Antimicrotubule Agent/Vinca Alkaloid

About Vinblastine (Velban®, Alkaban AQ)

Vinblastine is a member of the vinca alkaloids family of chemotherapy agents. These medications work by interfering with cell division, which leaves the tumor unable to grow and spread. Vinblastine was developed from the Madagascar periwinkle plant.

How to Take Vinblastine

This medication is administered intravenously (IV, into a vein), by a trained professional. Specific dosage and dosing schedule depends on the person's size and the type of cancer being treated.

This medication is a vesicant. Even when carefully and correctly administered by trained personnel, this drug may cause a feeling of burning and pain. There is a risk that this medication may leak out of the vein at the injection site, resulting in tissue damage that can be severe. If the area of injection becomes red, swollen, or painful at any time during or after the injection, notify your doctor or nurse immediately. Do not apply anything to the site unless instructed by your doctor or nurse.

The blood levels of this medication can be affected by certain foods and medications, so they should be avoided. These include: grapefruit, grapefruit juice, ketoconazole, rifampin, phenytoin, St. John's wort, and many anti-fungal medications. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about all medications and supplements you take.

Possible Side Effects of Vinblastine

There are a number of things you can do to manage the side effects of vinblastine. Talk to your care team about these recommendations. They can help you decide what will work best for you. These are some of the most common or important side effects:

Constipation

Vinblastine can cause serious constipation, abdominal pain and can even lead to a blockage or stoppage of the bowel (called paralytic ileus) if not treated promptly. There are several things you can do to prevent or relieve constipation. Include fiber in your diet (fruits and vegetables), drink 8-10 glasses of non-alcoholic fluids a day, and keep active. A stool softener once or twice a day may prevent constipation. If you do not have a bowel movement for 2-3 days, you should contact your healthcare team for [suggestions to relieve the constipation](#).

Neurotoxicity

This is a toxicity that affects the nerves. The most common effect is called peripheral neuropathy, which affects the nerves in the hands and feet, causing causes numbness or tingling, often in the pattern of a stocking or glove. This can get progressively worse with additional doses of the medication and can lead to difficulty with balance or walking. In some people, the symptoms slowly resolve after the medication is stopped, but for some, it never goes away completely. You should let your healthcare provider know if you experience numbness or tingling in the hands and feet, as they may need to adjust the doses of your

medication.

The vinca alkaloid chemotherapies are known to cause neuropathy, but they can also cause neurologic toxicity that presents as mental depression, headache, malaise, dizziness, and seizures. It can also cause toxicity of the cranial nerves, which affects the vocal cords (changes in voice), eyes (visual changes) or facial nerves (drooping of the face or mouth). Patients can develop severe pain in the jaw soon after the first treatment with vincristine, which is caused by the medication affecting the nerves. If you notice any of these problems, notify your healthcare team right away.

Low White Blood Cell Count (Leukopenia or Neutropenia)

White blood cells (WBC) are important for fighting infection. While receiving treatment, your [WBC count can drop](#), putting you at a higher risk of getting an infection. You should let your doctor or nurse know right away if you have a fever (temperature greater than 100.4°F or 38°C), sore throat or cold, shortness of breath, cough, burning with urination, or a sore that doesn't heal.

Tips to preventing infection:

- [Washing hands](#), both yours and your visitors, is the best way to prevent the spread of infection.
- Avoid large crowds and people who are sick (i.e.: those who have a cold, fever or cough or live with someone with these symptoms).
- When working in your yard, wear protective clothing including long pants and gloves.
- Do not handle pet waste.
- Keep all cuts or scratches clean.
- Shower or bathe daily and perform frequent [mouth care](#).
- Do not cut cuticles or ingrown nails. You may wear nail polish, but not fake nails.
- Ask your oncology care team before scheduling dental appointments or procedures.
- Ask your oncology care team before you, or someone you live with, has any vaccinations.

Mouth Ulcers (Sores)

Certain cancer treatments can cause [sores or soreness in your mouth](#) and/or throat. Notify your doctor or nurse if your mouth, tongue, inside of your cheek or throat becomes white, ulcerated or painful. Performing [regular mouth care](#) can help prevent or manage mouth sores. If mouth sores become painful, your doctor or nurse can recommend a pain reliever.

- Brush with a soft-bristle toothbrush or cotton swab twice a day.
- Avoid mouthwashes that contain alcohol. A baking soda and/or salt warm water mouth rinse (2 level teaspoons of baking soda or 1 level teaspoon salt in an eight-ounce glass of warm water) is recommended 4 times daily.
- If your mouth becomes dry, eat moist foods, drink plenty of fluids (6-8 glasses), and suck on sugarless hard candy.
- Avoid smoking and chewing tobacco, drinking alcoholic beverages, and citrus juices.

Loss or Thinning of Scalp and Body Hair (Alopecia)

Your hair may become [thin, brittle, or may fall out](#). This typically begins two to three weeks after treatment starts. This hair loss can be all body hair, including pubic, underarm, legs/arms, eyelashes, and nose hairs. The use of scarves, wigs, hats, and hairpieces may help. Hair generally starts to regrow soon after treatment is completed. Remember your hair helps keep you warm in cold weather, so a hat is particularly important in cold weather or to protect you from the sun.

High Blood Pressure

This medication can cause high blood pressure (hypertension). Patients should have their blood pressure checked regularly during therapy. Any hypertension should be treated appropriately.

Decrease in Appetite or Taste Changes

Nutrition is an important part of your care. Cancer treatment can affect your appetite and, in some cases, the side effects of treatment can make eating difficult. Ask your oncology care team about nutritional counseling services at your treatment center to help with food choices.

- Try to eat five or six small meals or snacks throughout the day, instead of 3 larger meals.
- If you are not eating enough, nutritional supplements may help.
- You may experience a metallic taste or find that food has no taste at all. You may dislike foods or beverages that you liked before receiving cancer treatment. These symptoms can last for several months or longer after treatment ends.
- Avoid any food that you think smells or tastes bad. If red meat is a problem, eat chicken, turkey, eggs, dairy products, and fish without a strong smell. Sometimes cold food has less of an odor.
- Add extra flavor to meat or fish by marinating it in sweet juices, sweet and sour sauce, or dressings. Use seasonings like basil, oregano, or rosemary to add flavor. Bacon, ham, and onion can add flavor to vegetables.

Fatigue

Fatigue is very common during cancer treatment and is an overwhelming feeling of exhaustion that is not usually relieved by rest. While on cancer treatment, and for a period after, you may need to adjust your schedule to manage fatigue. Plan times to rest during the day and conserve energy for more important activities. Exercise can help combat fatigue; a simple daily walk with a friend can help. Talk to your healthcare team for helpful tips on dealing with this side effect.

Nausea and/or Vomiting

Talk to your doctor or nurse so they can prescribe medications to help you manage **nausea and vomiting**. In addition, dietary changes may help. Avoid things that may worsen the symptoms, such as heavy or greasy/fatty, spicy or acidic foods (lemons, tomatoes, oranges). Try antacids, (e.g. milk of magnesia, calcium tablets such as Tums), saltines, or ginger ale to lessen symptoms.

Call your doctor or nurse if you are unable to keep fluids down for more than 12 hours or if you feel lightheaded or dizzy at any time.

Important but Less Common Side Effects

- **Urinary retention:** Some patients may experience an inability to urinate (even when you feel that you need to). If you notice you are unable to urinate, you should call your healthcare team right away or go to the emergency room to be evaluated.
- **Pain in tumor-containing tissue:** Some patients may experience pain in tumor-containing tissue. This is thought to occur due to swelling of that area during its response to treatment.
- **Radiation Recall:** This medication may cause radiation recall. It may present as a skin reaction that looks like a sunburn (redness, swelling, soreness, peeling skin) in areas where radiation was previously given. Notify your oncology care team if you notice this side effect. Treatment can include topical steroid ointments and a delay in your next chemotherapy dose.

Sexual & Reproductive Concerns

This drug may affect your reproductive system, resulting in the menstrual cycle or sperm production becoming

irregular or stopping permanently. In addition, the desire for sex may decrease during treatment.

Exposure of an unborn child to this medication could cause birth defects, so you should not become pregnant or father a child while on this medication. Effective birth control is necessary during treatment, even if your menstrual cycle stops or you believe you are not producing sperm. You may want to consider sperm banking or egg harvesting if you may wish to have a child in the future. Discuss these options with your oncology team. You should consult with your healthcare team before breastfeeding while receiving this medication.

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