

Managing Side Effects of Antibody–Drug Conjugate (ADC) Therapy: A Guide for Patients With Metastatic Breast Cancer

Selected Common Side Effects with ADC Therapy

Nausea and Vomiting

Nausea and vomiting might occur¹

- Within 24 hours of treatment
- >24-120 hours after treatment

Patients and caregivers should note:

- When does nausea and vomiting occur?
- Potential causes of nausea and vomiting

Managing nausea and vomiting

- Take antiemetic medication as a prophylactic for prevention or at the first sign of nausea
- Make changes to diet
 - Eat smaller, more frequent meals
 - Avoid spicy foods
 - Eat ginger
- Other suggestions: _____

Contact your healthcare team when:

- Home treatment is not effective
- Food or liquids cannot be kept down
- Vomiting lasts longer than 2 days
- Symptoms of dehydration (excessive thirst, dry mouth, decreased urination, dark-colored urine, weakness, or dizziness/lightheadedness upon standing) occur
- Other: _____

Neutropenia

Definition

- Low levels of a type of white blood cell called a neutrophil that raises the risk of contracting an infection

Median time to onset: 22 days²

Patients and caregivers should note:

- Signs and symptoms of infection such as increased fever, sore throat, coughing, and fatigue

Monitoring neutropenia by your healthcare team²

- Blood counts done prior to treatment initiation and prior to each dose, or more frequently as needed

Contact your healthcare team when:

- Fever is greater than 102 degrees, presence of mouth ulcers, redness of skin, swelling, or abdominal or rectal pain

Fatigue

Fatigue might occur 1-2 weeks after the end of treatment³

Patients and caregivers should note:

- Changes in daily activities of life

Monitoring by your healthcare team

- Blood counts

Managing fatigue

- Delegate tasks to others
- Take daytime naps
- Include more low-impact physical activity like walking, chair yoga, or stretching for 10-20 minutes
- Food or liquids cannot be kept down
- Other suggestions: _____

Contact your healthcare team when fatigue:

- Is persistent, lasting longer than 2 weeks
- Interferes with daily activities
- Other: _____

Diarrhea

Definition

- Three or more loose or watery stools in a 24-hour period

Median time to onset: 12-14 days⁴

Once diarrhea occurs, it may last 5-7 days⁴

- Patients and caregivers should note
 - Changes in bowel movement (BM) frequency
 - Changes in consistency of BMs

Managing diarrhea

- Take an antidiarrheal medication
- Make changes to diet
 - Eat high-fiber foods
 - Avoid dairy products
- Other suggestions: _____

Contact your healthcare team when any of the following occurs:

- Diarrhea lasts more than 2 days
- Severe abdominal or rectal pain
- Bloody or black stools
- Fever over 102° F
- Other: _____

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Selected Rare Side Effects with ADC Therapy

Heart Damage

Patients and caregivers should note:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath

Monitoring of heart damage by your healthcare team^{2,5}

- Assess left ventricular dysfunction prior to treatment initiation and at regular intervals during treatment
- Perform an ECHO or MUGA scan every 12 weeks or more frequently as needed

Managing heart damage by your healthcare team²

- Dose interruption or permanent discontinuation of treatment may be required based on severity of the cardiotoxicity

Contact your healthcare team when:

- Any new or worsening cardiac symptoms (chest pain, shortness of breath) occurs

Liver Damage⁵

Patients and caregivers should note:

- abdominal pain, yellowing of the skin, and dark-colored urine

Monitoring liver function by your healthcare team¹

- Perform blood liver tests prior to treatment initiation and before each dose

Managing liver function

- Reduced or discontinued dose may be necessary if blood liver tests are increased

List of adverse reactions, including laboratory abnormalities related to ADC therapy^{2,5}

Decreased white blood cell count, nausea, decreased hemoglobin, decreased neutrophil count, decreased lymphocyte count, increased aspartate aminotransferase, decreased platelet, fatigue, increased alanine aminotransferase, hair loss, increased alkaline phosphatase, vomiting, constipation, decreased potassium, pain in bones, ligaments, tendons, or nerves, decreased appetite, increased transaminases, diarrhea, COVID-19, hemorrhage, respiratory infection, abdominal pain, headache, joint pain, increased bilirubin, weakness, decreased weight, dry mouth, cough, upper respiratory tract infection, numbness or tingling in hands or feet, soreness in mouth, fever, decreased red blood cell count, muscle pain, nose bleeds, increased creatinine, shortness of breath, changes in taste, insomnia, rash, dizziness, indigestion, interstitial lung disease, dry eye, decreased potassium

Interstitial lung disease (ILD)/pneumonitis

Median time to onset: 5.5 months²

Patients and caregivers should note:

- Shortness of breath
- Dry, hacking cough
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Chest discomfort

Monitoring ILD by your healthcare team²

- Chest scans

Managing ILD by your healthcare team

- Corticosteroid treatment may be administered for asymptomatic (Grade 1) and should be administered for symptomatic (Grade ≥ 2) ILD
- Permanent discontinuation may be necessary based on severity of the ILD^{2,5}

Contact your healthcare team when:²

- Any new or worsening respiratory symptoms (cough, shortness of breath, fever) occurs

References

1. Park YH, Bianchini G, Cortés J, et al. Nausea and vomiting in an evolving anticancer treatment landscape: long-delayed and emetogenic anti-body-drug conjugates. *Future Oncol.* 2025;21:1261-1272.
2. Enhertu (fam-trastuzumab deruxtecan-nxki) [prescribing information]. Daiichi Sankyo. Basking Ridge, NJ.
3. Fatigue and Cancer Drugs. Cancer Research UK. Accessed June 30, 2025. www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/cancer-drugs/side-effects/fatigue
4. D'Arienzo A, Verrazzo A, Pagliuca M, et al. Toxicity profile of antibody-drug conjugates in breast cancer: practical considerations. *EClinicalMedicine.* 2023;62:102113.
5. Kadcyla (ado-trastuzumab emtansine) [prescribing information]. Genentech Inc. South San Francisco, CA.