

**OTHER ORGANISATIONS****Action Breast Cancer**

43/45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4.

National Breast Cancer
Helpline Freefone:
1800 30 90 40

Email: abc@irishcancer.ie

Irish Cancer Society

43/45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4.

Freefone Helpline:
1800 200 700

Email: helpline@irishcancer.ie

Voluntary Health Insurance

VHI House
Lower Abbey Street
Dublin 1.

Callsave: 1850 44 44 44

Email: info@vhi.ie

Website: www.vhi.ie

Quinn Healthcare

Mill House

Fermoy

Co. Cork.

LoCall: 1890 70 08 90

Email:

info@quinn-healthcare.com

Website:

www.quinn-healthcare.com.ie

Hibernian Health

PO BOX 764, Freepost,

Togher,

Co. Cork

LoCall: 1850 716666

Email:

support@hibernianhealthinsur
ance.ie

Website:

www.hibernianhealth.com

USEFUL WEBSITES**Irish Cancer Society**

www.cancer.ie

Breast Cancer Care UK

www.breastcancercare.org.uk

Cancerbackup

www.cancerbackup.org

**The Susan G. Komen
Foundation**

www.komen.org

Europa Donna

www.europadonnaireland.com

**Manual Lymph Drainage
Ireland**

www.mldireland.com

Lymphoedema Ireland

www.lymphireland.ie

**ABC -
ACTION BREAST CANCER**

Action Breast Cancer, a programme of the Irish Cancer Society, is the leading provider of breast cancer information and support in Ireland. Each year we reach over 25,000 women who are concerned about breast cancer or breast health. Our services are free and include:

- National Breast Cancer Helpline 1800 30 90 40 - staffed by specialist cancer nurses
- Patient care programmes - providing emotional support and practical assistance for those living with breast cancer
- Health promotion - providing community and workplace programmes on breast awareness and leading a healthy lifestyle
- Advocacy - providing a voice for those affected by breast cancer in Ireland
- Professional support - complementing the services offered by those caring for breast cancer patients
- Research - funding vital Irish research that will have a significant impact on the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

ABC is funded entirely by donations from the public. If you would like to support our work or make a donation please contact us.

action
breast
cancer

a programme of
irish cancer society

Freefone Helpline

1800 30 90 40

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FACTSHEET



information on **drug therapy**

Herceptin (trastuzumab)

This factsheet explains what Herceptin is, how it works, when it may be given, what the benefits are and what side effects may occur. Herceptin is the brand name of the drug that is used throughout the factsheet. Most people know it by this name, although its generic (general) name is trastuzumab.

WHAT IS HERCEPTIN?

Herceptin belongs to a new group of drugs known as monoclonal antibodies. It can be given to treat patients with primary or secondary Breast Cancer.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Herceptin targets cancer cells that 'overproduce' or make too much of a substance called HER2. This protein is found on the surface of breast cancer

cells. Herceptin slows or stops the growth of these cells.

WHO MIGHT BE OFFERED HERCEPTIN?

Herceptin is only used to treat cancers that have high levels of the "HER2" protein or are HER2 positive. Approximately 20 - 30% of breast cancers overproduce HER2.

It may be given on its own or with chemotherapy.

CAN I BE TESTED FOR HER2?

Your tumour can be tested for HER2 status as part of routine diagnostic testing at all breast cancer disease stages. The test can be done on tissue stored at the hospital from your original diagnosis or a new biopsy can be taken.

HOW IS HERCEPTIN GIVEN?

Herceptin is given into a vein in the arm or hand in a drip.



You will have your treatment as an outpatient, usually once a week, although it can also be given once every three weeks.

With weekly treatment, the first dose is given over 90 minutes. If you don't have any side effects then further doses are given over 30 minutes. With three-weekly treatment, each dose is given over 90 minutes.

You may be given Herceptin on its own or in combination with chemotherapy drugs.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF HERCEPTIN?

Everyone reacts differently to drugs. Some people may experience more side effects than others. As Herceptin only affects cancer cells it has fewer side effects than chemotherapy drugs that also affect healthy cells. If you are having both at the same time, you may have other side effects from the chemotherapy that are not listed here. If you have any questions about side effects, talk to your breast care nurse or specialist.

Common side effects

Flu-like symptoms

You may have fever, chills and mild pain in some parts of your body shortly after the drug has been given. These are only temporary and can be helped with mild painkillers such as paracetamol.

Nausea

If you feel sick this is usually mild and temporary and can be treated effectively with anti-sickness drugs.

Diarrhoea

You may have mild diarrhoea but your specialist or GP can prescribe medicine to help control this.

Less common side effects

You may have other symptoms after your first treatment, for example, headache, dizziness, rash, vomiting or breathlessness. These symptoms are usually very mild and don't usually recur with later treatments.

Rare side effects

Effects on the heart

A small number of people receiving Herceptin may develop heart problems such as low blood pressure or palpitations, although most of the symptoms can be treated successfully. Heart problems seem to be more common where Herceptin is given with certain chemotherapy drugs, particularly doxorubicin. This may be more of a risk in patients who are over 65.

HOW LONG WILL I BE ON HERCEPTIN?

The length of time Herceptin is given will vary from person to person and your specialist will talk to you about what is best for you.

If you are being given Herceptin with chemotherapy or you are taking part in a clinical trial, you may be on it for a specific length of time.

information on **drug therapy**

HERCEPTIN



FURTHER SUPPORT

If you have any concerns about taking Herceptin you can talk to your specialist, chemotherapy nurse or breast care nurse.

With a breast cancer diagnosis, there may be times when you feel overcome by fear, anxiety, sadness, depression or anger. You may be able to cope with these feelings on your own or with the support of those closest to you such as your family and friends.

If you find you need extra support, you can talk to your oncology nurse or home care specialist nurse. A counsellor or psychotherapist may be more appropriate if you need more long-term professional help.

The Irish Cancer Society funds a counselling service. A counsellor will provide emotional support by allowing you to express your feelings and fears. Counselling may help you to see things differently, and help you through a difficult patch. You may be able to express worries or concerns to a counsellor that you do not wish to discuss with others. For further information contact the National Breast Cancer Helpline freefone 1800 30 90 40.

HELP FROM ACTION BREAST CANCER

Action Breast Cancer, a programme of the Irish Cancer Society, provides breast cancer information and support, and funds breast cancer research. Our services are free, confidential and accessible.

For more information call the National Breast Cancer Helpline on Freefone 1800 30 90 40 or visit **www.cancer.ie**