

Leuprolide (Lupron)

Why is this drug prescribed?

Leuprolide is a drug used to treat advanced prostate cancer. In most instances, it is used to treat patients whose disease has already spread beyond the prostate to other organs or tissues. In some cases, it is used to shrink extensive prostate cancers to make them treatable with surgery or radiation therapy.

Prostate cancer is known to require male hormones made in the testicles to grow. In addition, a lowering of male hormone levels by any means usually results in shrinkage of prostate cancer.

Leuprolide has no direct effect on prostate cancer. It works by acting on hormones made in the pituitary (a part of the brain). The pituitary makes a special substance which causes the testicles to manufacture and release male hormones or testosterone. Leuprolide stops the pituitary from making this releasing factor. The effects of leuprolide on the body is similarly to surgical removal of the testicles.

How should it be used?

Only a physician can prescribe leuprolide and it must be given in a doctor's office.

What special instructions should I follow while using this drug?

You must come in for your injection. If you are going to be out of town after your injection is due, we should try to arrange a leuprolide injection from a physician in the area you are visiting.

What should I do if I forget to come in for an injection?

Come in as soon as you remember. If you are out of town, you may have to call to find out where you might receive your injection.

What side effects can this drug cause and what can I do about them?

The most common side effect is hot flashes. One might experience a sense of warmth, particularly on the chest and face and arms, with sweating. These may occur many times a day, particularly early in the treatment until one's body becomes accustomed to the change of hormone status.

In some men, the symptoms of cancer may initially worsen, particularly those with bone pain or difficulty urinating. Leuprolide's action is such that a brief increase in the male hormone levels are often seen initially before the hormone levels fall. This rise in hormone levels may actually cause the tumor to grow or swell enough to make the symptoms worsen temporarily. This effect is called a "tumor flare".

Possible but rare side effects include nausea and/or vomiting. Eat a light snack if you experience nausea. If these effects persist or are severe, contact your doctor. You may also experience swelling of hands, feet or lower legs (fluid retention). Contact your doctor if these effects are bothersome.

Other side effects which also may be experienced are headache, dizziness or faintness, weakness or numbness of an arm or leg, sharp, crushing chest pain or heaviness in chest, sudden shortness of breath, cough, coughing up of blood, severe abdominal pain, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping. Contact your doctor immediately if you experience any of these effects.

What other precautions should I follow while using this drug?

Not all prostate cancers respond to treatment with luproside. If you develop pain or any new symptom, or have an increase in any previous symptom, contact your physician. They will be following your course with exams and tests, including scans and x-rays if necessary and prostate specific antigen blood tests.