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# Is Avastin right for me?

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Make an informed decision about Avastin

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**AVASTIN**<sup>®</sup>  
bevacizumab

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# What is this handbook about?

This booklet is for people with certain kinds of cancer who wish to know more about Avastin as a treatment option.

Understandably, there is a lot to take in during this time, and a lot of your decisions will need to be considered in your own time and place. This guide aims to help explain a little about treatment with Avastin.

Please contact your healthcare team to discuss any thoughts or questions that you may have after reading this booklet.

All words italicised like *this* are explained in the glossary at the back of this handbook on page 17.



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# About Avastin

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## What is Avastin?

Avastin is a targeted treatment that blocks *angiogenesis*, the process by which new blood vessels develop in the body.

Tumours rely on the formation of new blood vessels to grow and spread throughout the body. By blocking angiogenesis, Avastin starves the tumour of blood that it needs to grow.

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**You can learn more  
about this process at:  
[cancertreatments.co.nz](http://cancertreatments.co.nz)**

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Avastin is not *chemotherapy*; it is a *biologic therapy*. Biologic therapies are often used with chemotherapy. Avastin helps to control tumour growth - it is not a cure for cancer.

Avastin is a medicine registered by *Medsafe* but not funded by *PHARMAC*, so you will need to pay for it.

Roche New Zealand has a *cost share programme* for Avastin, which offers assistance with the cost of your medicine. A number of doses or 'cycles' of the medicine are provided at no charge (the cost of the medicine only) and also caps the total amount you pay for Avastin.

Your specialist can advise you on how much you can expect to pay for treatment with Avastin.

## What types of cancer is Avastin used for?

Avastin is registered for the treatment of:

- 0 *Advanced colorectal cancer*
- 0 *Advanced ovarian cancer*
- 0 *Advanced renal cell cancer*
- 0 *Advanced breast cancer*
- 0 *Advanced non-small cell lung cancer*
- 0 *Advanced carcinoma of the cervix*

Avastin can also be used to treat high grade or recurrent Glioblastoma Multiforme (GBM), a type of brain cancer.

Although not a cure, Avastin has been shown to delay the progression or spreading of these cancer types, and has also been shown to increase the length of time patients survive with advanced colorectal cancer, non small-cell lung cancer, cervical cancer and ovarian cancer.

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Avastin is  
a biologic  
therapy that  
targets the  
tumour and  
starves it of  
the blood and  
nutrients it  
needs to grow

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# What can Avastin do for me?

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## Avastin, is used to treat a number of different cancer types

This section deals with some of the cancer types that Avastin is most commonly used for. If your type of cancer is not mentioned here, ask your specialist if Avastin might be right for you.

Every cancer is different. How Avastin could benefit you depends on a number of factors. Your specialist is the best person to ask regarding your personal situation.

## Advanced bowel cancer

Avastin is used in combination with chemotherapy to treat advanced bowel cancer. Studies have shown that when Avastin was added to chemotherapy, the average length of time people lived without their tumours growing or spreading was increased, compared to patients who received chemotherapy alone.

In addition some studies have shown that patients treated with Avastin may live longer than those treated with chemotherapy alone.

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## By adding Avastin people with advanced bowel cancer could live longer

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## Advanced ovarian cancer

Avastin is used in combination with chemotherapy to treat advanced ovarian cancer. Large studies of women with advanced ovarian cancer, showed that when Avastin was added to chemotherapy, the average length of time patients lived without their tumours growing or spreading increased, compared to patients who received chemotherapy alone.

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## Adding Avastin may help delay ovarian cancer tumours from growing or spreading

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## Cervical cancer

Avastin, in combination with chemotherapy is a treatment option for women with advanced cervical cancer. A clinical study showed that the addition of Avastin to chemotherapy increased the average length of time women lived without their cancer getting worse (8.2 months versus 5.9 months for those on chemotherapy alone). In addition, women who received Avastin also lived longer than women who received chemotherapy alone (17 versus 13.3 months).

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**Avastin may help women with advanced cervical cancer live longer**

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## Brain cancer

Avastin is used to treat patients with recurrent glioblastoma (GBM). In a clinical study, the majority of patients who were receiving steroids, (a type of medicine to reduce swelling and pressure in the brain) were able to reduce their dosage over time while receiving Avastin.

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**Avastin may allow people with glioblastoma to reduce their steroid dosage**

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## Lung cancer

Avastin is used in combination with chemotherapy, to treat patients with advanced, metastatic or recurrent, non-squamous, non-small cell lung cancer.

In a study of patients with advanced non-small cell lung cancer, patients who received Avastin plus chemotherapy lived for an average of 12.3 months, compared to 10.3 months for patients treated with chemotherapy alone.

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**Avastin may help people with lung cancer live longer**

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# What else do I need to know?

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## Side effects?

Because Avastin works in a different way to chemotherapy, it doesn't have many of the side effects of chemotherapy.

However, all medicines have side effects and Avastin is no different. In the clinical trials of Avastin in various cancer types, the most serious side effects were:

- 0 gastrointestinal perforations (hole in the wall of the stomach, large bowel, or small intestine)
- 0 bleeding
- 0 arterial and venous thromboembolism (blood clots in the arteries or veins)

The most frequently observed side effects were:

- 0 high blood pressure
- 0 tiredness
- 0 diarrhoea
- 0 abdominal pain

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# You may not experience any of these side effects

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It is important you tell your doctor about ANY side effects you experience while you are being treated, whether you think they are caused by Avastin or not.

## Side effect Management

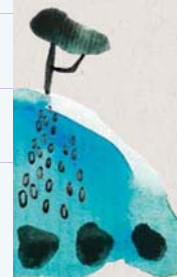
Your healthcare team are the best people to talk to about how to manage side effects.

It is important to think about how you might cope with these side effects if they were to happen. Use the space provided to write down some of your ideas.



## Ways to cope with possible side effects:

All medications have risks and benefits, and Avastin may not be suitable for some people. A full list of side effects, warnings and uses for Avastin can be found on the medsafe website: <http://www.medsafe.govt.nz/consumers/cmi/a/avastin.pdf>



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# Funded & unfunded medicines in New Zealand

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## The role of MEDSAFE

Medsafe is the New Zealand Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Authority. They're responsible for the regulation of medicines and medical devices in New Zealand. It's their job to ensure that the benefits of any medicine outweigh the risks (side effects). Once a medicine has been registered by Medsafe, it can then be used in New Zealand. The supplier of the medicine can then apply to PHARMAC to have it funded. However, not all Medsafe registered medicines will receive funding.

## What are non-PHARMAC funded Medicines?

New Zealand is a small country and can't afford to fund all available medicines. Each year, PHARMAC is given a set amount of money from the NZ Government, which they use to buy medicines for New Zealanders. PHARMAC's role is to decide which medicines get their funding.

Making a decision to fund a particular medicine can be difficult, and takes time. When making a decision, PHARMAC reviews lots of information and talks to healthcare experts and patients.

When PHARMAC decides not to fund a medicine, this medicine is called a non-PHARMAC funded medicine. If you and your doctor decide that an unfunded medicine is the best treatment option, you will need to pay for the medicine yourself, either out of your own pocket or by accessing other funding sources. On the next page you can learn more about the different

funding options available.

Non-PHARMAC *funded medicines* are common in New Zealand, but not being funded doesn't mean they are not effective.

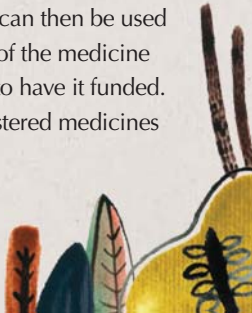
If you are thinking about a *non-PHARMAC funded medicine*, talk to your doctor about:

- 0 How much the medicine costs
- 0 Benefits the medicine might give you
- 0 Any risks or side effects
- 0 Whether a cost share programme is available to you (see page 12 to find out about cost share programmes)

## Avastin is a non-PHARMAC funded medicine

Avastin is an additional treatment option you may wish to consider.

In the next few pages you can read more about the costs of Avastin, some options to help fund treatment and a section on weighing up the pros and cons of treatment with Avastin.



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# Other funding options

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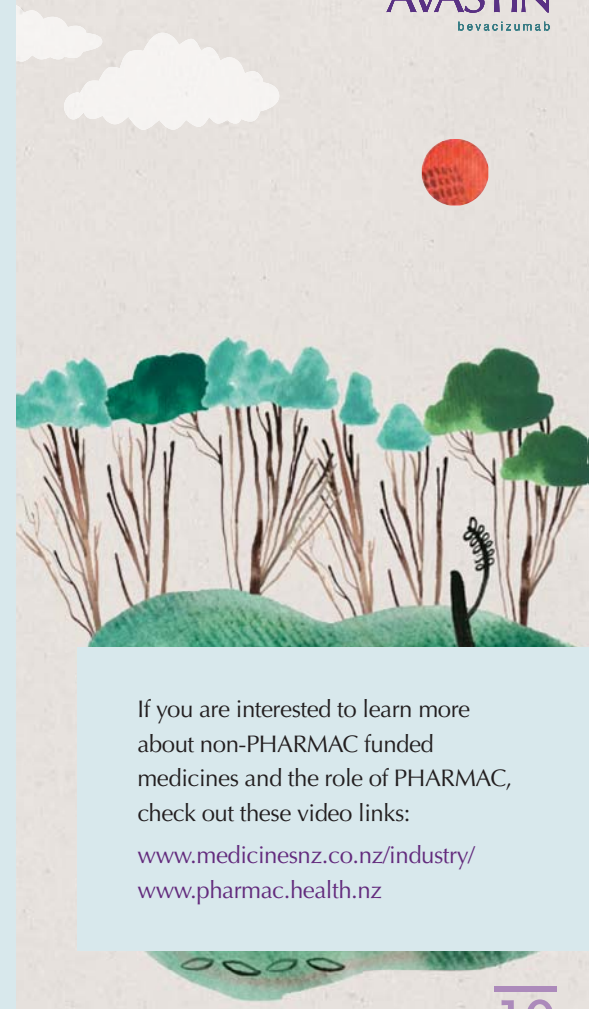
The following list includes a number of different options for funding non-PHARMAC funded medicines:

**1** **Cost Share programmes**  
Many pharmaceutical companies have cost share programmes for non-PHARMAC funded medicines. These programmes reduce the overall cost of a medicine making them more affordable for the patient. Roche has a cost share programme for Avastin that makes it more affordable.

**2** **Private health insurance**  
If you have private health insurance you should ask your provider if your plan covers non-PHARMAC funded medicines.

**3** **Life insurance**  
If you have life insurance you should ask your provider if your plan can be used to pay for your treatment.

**4** **Private fundraising**  
More and more New Zealanders are going through sites such as [www.givealittle.co.nz](http://www.givealittle.co.nz) to fundraise for treatment not funded by PHARMAC.



If you are interested to learn more about non-PHARMAC funded medicines and the role of PHARMAC, check out these video links:

[www.medicinesnz.co.nz/industry/](http://www.medicinesnz.co.nz/industry/)  
[www.pharmac.health.nz](http://www.pharmac.health.nz)

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# How much will Avastin cost me?

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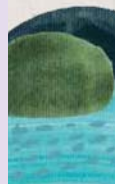
## Deciding to pay for treatment is a big decision

It can have an impact on you and the people close to you. You don't need to make the decision alone. You may like to involve your family and healthcare team in the decision.

## How much the treatment costs you will depend on a few things:

- 0 The type of cancer you have and dose given
- 0 Your weight (the amount of Avastin you will be given is based on milligrams per kg of body weight)
- 0 Number of infusions (based on how well you are responding to Avastin)

There may also be extra costs for having the treatment at a private clinic. **It is best to talk to your specialist and healthcare team to find out the total cost for you.**



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# Support for managing the cost of treatment

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The cost of the medicine can play a big part in deciding whether or not to have treatment. Use the table on page 16 to help you weigh up the pros and cons of Avastin for you.

You may have read about cost share programmes earlier in this handbook. Cost share programmes can help reduce the cost of a non-PHARMAC funded medicine like Avastin.

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## The Avastin Cost Share Programme reduces the cost of receiving Avastin

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The Avastin cost share programme is capped at a specific price depending on the type of cancer the treatment is for.

However, this cost only includes the medicine, it does not include other costs such as specialist care or reconstitution and administration of the Avastin infusion. Ask your specialist for more information on this cost share programme and the costs involved.

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# With everything considered, why would I choose Avastin?

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As mentioned, Avastin is not a cure.

Treatment with Avastin may delay the length of time before your cancer grows or spreads. For patients with bowel cancer, lung cancer or cervical cancer, Avastin may also improve survival time.

How much benefit you could gain is dependent on a number of factors including:

- 0 The type of cancer you have, and
- 0 The grade and severity of the cancer

For many people Avastin may be able to offer a few extra months before their cancer grows or spreads but for some people Avastin may offer more.



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## Avastin may be able to improve survival time

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### Understanding the benefits

Your doctor will not be able to tell you how much time you might get from treatment with Avastin.

The best they can tell you is the average number of months that have been observed in clinical studies.

It is important to know that this number is the average amount of extra survival time that has been seen in a large number of people treated with Avastin.

Some of the people would have had less benefit from Avastin treatment and others would have had more.



### How do I get Avastin?

Avastin is not available in public hospitals, so you will need to access it in a private clinic. Your specialist will be able to help you contact these treatment clinics if you wish to get further information on the use of Avastin.

For a list of private providers, go to [www.cancertreatments.co.nz/treatment-providers](http://www.cancertreatments.co.nz/treatment-providers)

Please talk to your specialist for further information on how you can access Avastin privately. Your specialist may even be able to suggest a clinic in the space below.

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# How do I decide if Avastin is right for me?

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You can use this section of the handbook to help you decide whether or not Avastin is right for you. Making a decision about treatment involves weighing up the pros and cons.

## Pros of treatment

To look at the pros or advantages of having treatment, ask yourself: what are the good things about having this treatment?

For example, a pro of treatment could be that it may give you more time with your family. Or perhaps it could help you be around for an important event such the birth of a child or a family wedding. How much benefit Avastin could give you is best discussed with your specialist, because everyone is different.

## Cons of treatment

To look at the cons or disadvantages of having treatment, ask yourself: what are the not so good things about having this treatment?

For example, a con of treatment may be that you have to pay for the treatment yourself. How much the treatment costs you is best discussed with your specialist, because everyone is different.

Use the table on the next page to write down the pros and cons as you see them. Writing things down in this way can help us to make sense of our thoughts. You may like to complete this table with help from your specialist or nurse, or someone close to you, such as a family member.

You don't need to complete this table right away, all in one go. You may like to talk to others and to think about things over time. You can add to this table as you go.

When filling out this table you may like to think about the effect treatment will have on:

- 0 Your finances
- 0 Your quality of life
- 0 Your family time



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## Pros or advantages

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Reasons for having Avastin


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## Cons or disadvantages

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Reasons against having Avastin




When making a decision about treatment, it is important to get the right information. This handbook provides you with some information but your healthcare team know you and your situation best. Talk to your healthcare team to make sure you get the information that is right for you.

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# Glossary

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## Cost Share programme

A programme designed to assist patients' access to non-Pharmac funded medicines by making them more affordable for the patient.

## Advanced breast cancer

Also known as metastatic or secondary breast cancer. Invasive breast cancer that has spread from the breast to other parts of the body.

## Advanced carcinoma of the cervix

Advanced stage of cancer which means cancer that has grown into tissues around the cervix, or spread further.

## Advanced colorectal cancer

Advanced stage of cancer which means that the disease has spread from the colorectal region to the lymph nodes.

## Advanced non-small cell lung cancer

Advanced stage of cancer which means that the cancer has spread to both lungs, to fluid in the area around the lungs, or to another part of the body, such as the liver or other organs.

## Advanced ovarian cancer

Advanced stage of cancer which means that the disease has spread away from the ovary to other parts of the body.

## Advanced renal cell cancer

Advanced stage of cancer which means that the disease has spread to the lymph system or other organs. Also means that the cancer may have spread into more than one lymph node near the kidney or elsewhere in the body.

## Angiogenesis

The process by which new blood vessels develop to support the growth of new tissues (including tumours) by delivering the nutrients and oxygen they need.

## Biologic therapy

A type of treatment that uses substances made from living organisms to treat disease. These substances may occur naturally in the body or may be made in the laboratory.

## Chemotherapy

A cytotoxic (toxic to cells) form of treatment for cancer that kills cancer cells or slows their growth.

## Glioblastoma Multiforme (GBM)

Is the most common malignant primary brain tumor.

## Medsafe

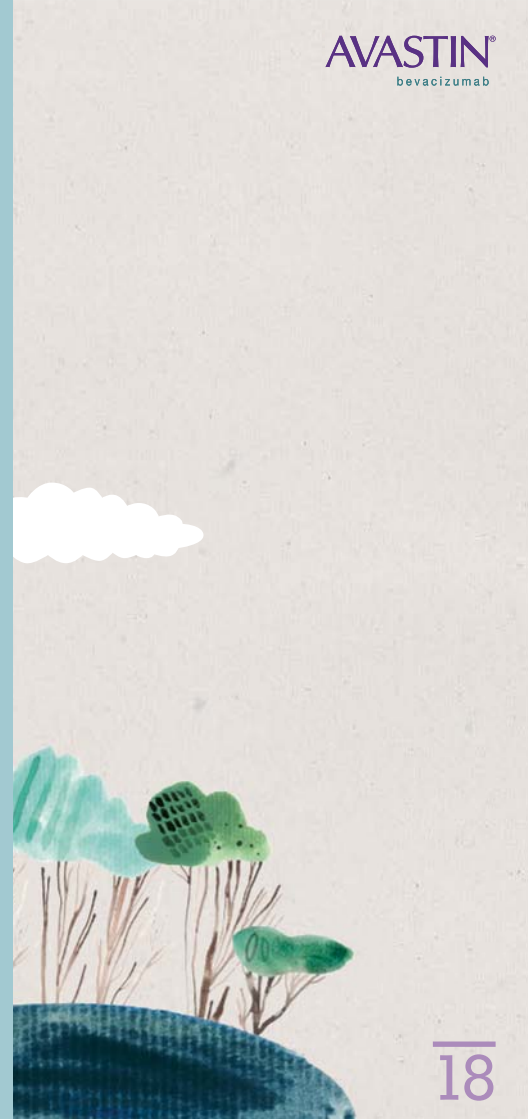
The New Zealand Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Authority. Medsafe is responsible for the regulation of medicines and medical devices in New Zealand. They ensure that medicines and medical devices are acceptably safe and effective for use in New Zealand.

## Non-PHARMAC funded medicines

Medicines registered in New Zealand by Medsafe that are not subsidised by PHARMAC.

## PHARMAC

The Pharmaceutical Management Agency. This is the New Zealand Crown agency that decides, on behalf of District Health Boards, which medicines and related products are subsidised for use in the community and public hospitals.





Avastin® (bevacizumab), 100 mg/4mL and 400 mg/16 mL vials, is a **Prescription Medicine** used to treat metastatic (spreading) colorectal, kidney, breast, brain, lung, ovarian and cervical cancers.

**Do not use Avastin if:** you have had an allergic reaction to Avastin, any of its ingredients or other antibodies, or if you have been coughing or spitting up blood.

**Tell your doctor if:** you are pregnant or breast-feeding, or plan to become pregnant or breast-feed; you have any other health problems, especially the following: inflammation of the bowel or stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, a history of blood clots or stroke, bleeding problems, bleeding in the lungs or coughing or spitting up blood, low white blood cell counts, you have/ had a fistula, or have a history of diabetes; you have had major surgery in the last 28 days or a wound that has not healed properly; you have had a blocked lung artery (pulmonary embolism); you have heart disease; you have received anthracyclines (e.g. doxorubicin) for cancer, or radiotherapy to your chest; you are 65 years of age or older, or you are taking any other medicines.

**Side Effects:** Avastin may worsen some chemotherapy side effects when used in combination with chemotherapy agents, including hair loss, nail disorders, pain, redness and/or swelling of your hands and/or soles of your feet, and a feeling of numbness or tingling in the hands or feet.

**Tell your doctor immediately or go to your nearest Accident and Emergency Centre if you notice any of the following:** severe body pain and/or numbness (unable to sense pain or hot/cold temperatures on your body, arms, and/or legs. Any stomach pain or cramps; severe headache; severe diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting; loss of control of your bladder or bowels; passage of wind or bowel motions through the vagina; coughing or spitting up blood; pain, redness, swelling and warmth over a vein which may suggest blood clots; pain and/or swelling in the lower legs, feet or hands; severe bleeding or problems with your wounds healing after surgery; seizures; confusion; sleepiness/drowsiness or fainting; abscesses (pus-filled sores); severe infection with high fever, chills, headache, confusion and rapid breathing; feeling of numbness or tingling in feet or hands; dry mouth with thirst and/or darkened urine; increased heart rate; shortness of breath; symptoms of an allergic reaction which may include shortness of breath, wheezing or difficulty breathing, swelling of the face, lips, tongue or other parts of the body, or rash, itching or hives on the skin.

**Possible common side-effects may also include:** high blood pressure (symptoms include, headache, dizziness, ringing in the ears, tiredness, blurred vision); body pain, tiredness/ weakness; diarrhoea, constipation or rectal bleeding; sore mouth or mouth ulcers; loss of appetite, being thirsty; shortness of breath; runny, blocked or bleeding nose; dry, scaling or inflamed skin, change in skin colour; taste changes or loss of taste; blurred vision (including increased production of tears, double visions, drooping eyelid(s), shimmering lights in your vision, sensitivity to light or temporary loss of sight; dizziness; trouble with your balance; headache; migraines; frequent infections with symptoms such as fever, chills or sore throat; changes in your voice or difficulty speaking or swallowing; loss of body weight; abdominal, pelvic, rectal or back pain.

Avastin has risks and benefits. Ask your oncologist if Avastin is right for you. Use strictly as directed. If symptoms continue or you have side effects, see your healthcare professional. For further information on Avastin, please talk to your health professional or visit [www.medsafe.govt.nz](http://www.medsafe.govt.nz) for Avastin Consumer Medicine Information.

**Avastin is not funded by PHARMAC. You will need to pay the full cost of this medicine.  
A prescription charge and normal oncologist fees may apply.**

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**AVASTIN**<sup>®</sup>  
bevacizumab