

Decoding Drug Names

Fact Sheet

What do all those syllables in my drug name mean?

Generic drug names are structured by National Institutes of Health committees to reflect the type of condition that the drug is used for. This is true of most official generic names, such as those labelled as [USAN] for United States Adopted Name. The table below shows the various name stems used in drugs that treat Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia (and other conditions).

This table, condensed from the National Library of Medicine Drug Information Portal, druginfo.nlm.nih.gov/drugportal/jsp/drugportal/DrugNameGenericStems.jsp, has columns for the Generic Drug Name Stem, a Stem Definition, and a Drug Example. Each stem has hyphens at one or both ends of its text to show that it is found at the beginning, middle, or end of a generic name. Some examples: the stem “-mab” would be found at the end of a generic name and corresponds to the definition “monoclonal antibody”; “-tu-” is found in the middle and refers to an antibody that was constructed to have a tumor as a target; and “-xi-” is found in the middle and refers to chimeric antibody (75% human and 25% mouse).

Generic Drug Name Stem	Stem Definition	Drug Example
-arabine	Antineoplastics (arabinofuranosyl derivatives)	fludar arabine
-anib	Angiogenesis inhibitor	semax anib
-imus	Immunosuppressive	everol imus
-mab	Monoclonal antibodies	rituxi mab , ofatumu mab , obintuzu mab
-mo	Mouse derived antibody	tositu momab
-mu-	Totally human derived antibody	ofatumu mab
-mustine	Antineoplastics (chloroethylamine derivatives)	bendam ustine
-tinib	Inhibitor of tyrosine kinases	ibruti tinib
-tu-	Antibody that was constructed to have a tumor as a target	ritu tu ximab, ofatu tu mumab, obintu tu zumab, alem tu zumab
-xi-	Chimeric antibody (75% human) and 25% mouse)	rituxi xi mab
-zu-	Humanized antibody (95% human and 5% mouse)	obintuzu zu mab, alem tu zumab
-zomib	Protease inhibitor	bortez zomib , carfilz zomib , ixazo zomib