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Erlotinib (Tarceva)

Erlotinib is a drug that is taken by mouth and blocks an enzyme linked to the Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor (EGFR). It is effective for many people with cancers driven by mutations of the EGFR gene. About 95% of people tolerate erlotinib, while about 5% stop because of side effects.

Potential side effects:

- Diarrhea 55% of people (usually mild but 6% have severe diarrhea)
- Rash is seen in 75% of people and can be treated with topical antibiotics, topical steroid creams and oral antibiotics. Occasionally the drug must be stopped due to rash.
- Inflammation and/or scarring of lungs is seen in <1% of people. Unexplained cough and shortness of breath should trigger cessation of erlotinib and evaluation (usually noncontrast CT Chest).
- Anemia (about 1%)
- Fatigue (about 1%)
- Nausea and vomiting (about 1%)
- Mouth sores are occasionally seen.

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