

Chemotherapy

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You must carefully read the "Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer" below in order to understand and correctly use this information

Why is this procedure done?

Chemotherapy uses drugs to kill cancer cells in your body. This is often called chemo. It may be used together with surgery, radiation, and other drugs to treat cancer. Chemo may be given daily, weekly, or monthly.

Chemo is given based on the type of cancer you have, your overall health, earlier cancer treatments, and your goals. Chemo can be:

- Taken as a pill, capsule, or liquid
- Given through an I.V.
- Given by a shot into the muscle or the skin
- Put into spinal fluid through a needle injected into a fluid-filled space in the lower spine
- Put on your skin if you have skin cancer

Chemo is done to:

- Kill cancer cells
- Keep your cancer from spreading to other parts of your body
- Slow cancer growth
- Prepare you for other treatments like radiation and surgery
- Help with pain
- Get you ready for a transplant

When Your White Blood Count Is Low



Chemotherapy Care



What will the results be?

Cancer cells grow faster than other cells in your body. Chemo targets fast growing cancer cells; however, some of your normal cells may be affected too. Some chemo may cause you to lose hair since these are fast growing cells. Once your chemo is complete, your hair will grow back.

Your goal for chemo will depend on the kind of cancer and how much is in your body. Chemo helps to treat cancer. For some people, this means decreasing the pain from cancer. For others, it means curing the cancer.

What happens before the procedure?

- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or you think you are pregnant.
- Your doctor will take your history. Talk to your doctor about:
 - All the drugs you are taking. Be sure to include all prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, and herbal supplements. Tell the doctor about any drug allergy. Bring a list of drugs you take with you.
 - Any allergies you have to latex, tape, or topical solutions like iodine or alcohol.
 - Your doctor may suggest having a device like a catheter, port, or pump put in. This makes chemo easier as you will not need an I.V. every time.
 - Your doctor may ask you to see your dentist to check your teeth for any infections.

- Your doctor will talk about all the side effects that may happen after your treatment.
- Ask someone to drive you home after each treatment until you see how chemo affects you.

What happens during the procedure?

If chemo is given through an I.V.:

- Your doctor will place a small plastic tube called a catheter in a vein. The chemo drug will flow from a bag or bottle into your blood.

If chemo is given by a shot:

- The shot will be given into skin that has been cleaned. Pressure will be put on the site to stop any bleeding. A bandage will be placed over the site.

If chemo is given through a tube to your spine:

- You will lie on your side with your knees bent towards your belly.
- The skin on your lower back will be cleaned with a cool solution.
- The area will be numbed. Your doctor will put a needle into your back and give you the chemo.
- You will need to lie down for a few hours.

If chemo is given by mouth, you will be given directions to take it at home.

- Take as instructed. Do not ever change your dose on your own.
- Use a calendar or reminder on your phone to keep track of when to take your drugs.
- Know how to store and handle your oral chemo drugs. You may need to wear gloves or leave it in the container you were given.
- Be sure you know what to do if you:
 - Throw up your dose of the chemo drug
 - You miss or are late taking a dose
 - Have extra chemo drugs and need to get rid of them

What happens after the procedure?

There are lots of different chemo drugs. Some may make you feel very weak and tired within a couple of hours, while others may take several days. After a couple of treatments, you will be able to see a pattern in the way your chemo drugs affect you. This will help you make plans for your daily activities.

What care is needed at home?

- Ask your doctor what you need to do when you go home. Make sure you ask questions if you do not understand what the doctor says. This way you will know what you need to do.
- Take your drugs as ordered by your doctor.
- You may feel tired for a few days. Plan for that by changing your work schedule, getting help with taking care of the kids and meals. Take short naps during the day. Plan to try and rest on the days you find most tiring after each chemo treatment.
- Eat a healthy diet and drink fluids. Healthy foods will help give your body the strength to complete your chemo treatments. Eat small meals more often instead of 3 large meals. Set specific times throughout the day to eat. Drink milkshakes, smoothies, soups, or juices if you are not able to tolerate solid foods.
- Your hair may start to fall out. Protect your scalp from the sun. Use sunscreen and wear a hat or scarf when you go outside. Some women may prefer to wear a wig.
- You may feel numbness or tingling in your hands or feet. Tell your doctor right away. Ask for help from family and friends if it affects your daily activities.
- Take good care of your teeth and mouth.
 - Brush and floss your teeth 2 to 3 times a day.
 - Use a toothbrush with soft bristles.
 - Use alcohol free mouthwash after brushing your teeth.
 - Rinse your mouth with warm salt water after each meal. Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon (2.5 grams) salt with a cup (240 mL) of warm water.
 - Visit your dentist at least 2 times each year.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 15 seconds. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers also work to kill germs.
- Your chance of getting an infection is higher. Avoid people with infections, colds, or flu.

What follow-up care is needed?

Your doctor will ask you to make visits to the office to check on your progress. Be sure to keep these visits. Your doctor may talk to you about more treatments.

What problems could happen?

- Feeling tired during and after chemo
- Hair loss
- Sore throat

- Upset stomach and throwing up
- Numbness and tingling in hands and feet. This may be a long-term problem.
- Weight loss
- Blood problems like anemia, bleeding, high risk of infection

When do I need to call the doctor?

- Signs of a very bad reaction. These include wheezing; chest tightness; fever; itching; bad cough; blue skin color; seizures; or swelling of face, lips, tongue, or throat. Go to the ER right away.
- Signs of catheter infection. These include swelling, redness, warmth around the tube; too much pain when touched; yellowish, greenish, or bloody discharge.
- Signs of infection. These include a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, chills, sweating.
- Very bad loose stools
- Not able to eat or drink

Where can I learn more?

American Cancer Society

<http://www.cancer.org/Treatment/TreatmentsandSideEffects/TreatmentTypes/Chemotherapy/UnderstandingChemotherapyAGuideforPatientsandFamilies/understanding-chemotherapy-how-will-i-get-chemo>

Cancer Research UK

<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/chemotherapy/plan/>

National Cancer Institute

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/chemotherapy-and-you/page2>

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