

CANCER CENTRE

# Coping With Chemotherapy



PRINCE COURT  
MEDICAL CENTRE

*for you. for life.*



Chemotherapy is a type of cancer treatment that uses drugs to destroy cancer cells. The side effects are different for different people, different drugs and different drug doses.

Some people may not be able to tolerate one particular drug but do quite well on another. A lot depends on finding the right dose that will be effective against the cancer but still be tolerable for each person. Fortunately, a number of effective medications are available.

### **CAUSE OF THE SIDE EFFECT**

Chemotherapy can also affect normal cells that divide rapidly.

Damage to healthy tissue during chemotherapy causes side effects to patients receiving treatment. Most cells that divide rapidly are:

- Oral cavity
- Skin
- Bone marrow
- Gastrointestinal tract
- Reproductive system
- Nervous system
- Kidney, bladder and lung

## **WHEN IT WILL END?**

These side-effects may appear in the first 2 weeks after chemotherapy and lasts for a few days before settling down. Normally, medication is given for the patient to take at home to limit these side-effects.

# Most Common Side Effects of Chemotherapy

## **LOW BLOOD COUNT**

Most chemotherapy drugs reduce your germ fighting white blood cells (WBC), which increases your chance of developing an infection.

- Ensure good personal hygiene.
- Avoid crowded areas.
- Monitor temperature regularly.
- Avoid eating raw food and wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.

## **NAUSEA AND VOMITING**

Certain chemotherapy drugs are more likely to cause nausea and vomiting than others. Preventive measures are available to help you avoid these side effects.

- Stagger small meals throughout the day rather than eating fewer, larger meals.
- Be sure you drink enough fluids.
- Avoid sweet, fried or fatty foods as well as food with strong odors.

## **ORAL MUCOSITIS**

This is an inflammation of the mucous lining of the upper gastrointestinal tract from mouth to stomach. It can be minimized by:

- Rinsing the mouth with salt water frequently (2 - 4 hourly).
- Apply lip moisturizer often.
- Use soft bristle toothbrush.
- Avoid spicy, very hot or cold beverages and foods.

## **STOMACH DISTURBANCE**

Chemotherapy can both increase (rapid) or decrease (slow) motility of the intestines. It can also alter the normal bacterial flora that is present in the intestines. This can effect digestion and cause abdominal pain, cramping or flatulence (gas).

- In case of diarrhea, eliminate intake of irritating food such as milk, high-fiber or greasy food. When condition is serious, anti diarrhea drugs will be necessary.
- In case of constipation, drink water at least 8 - 10 cups a day. Food with high fiber content (prune or prune juice etc.) and exercise can facilitate the frequency and ease of defecation. Patients are advised to consult their doctor immediately if their condition deteriorates.

## **HAIR LOSS**

Some hair loss may occur with chemotherapy medication and the hair will grow back after chemotherapy. Hair loss can occur on all parts of the body. This is temporary and the hair will grow back after chemotherapy.

## **LOSS OF APPETITE**

Chemo drugs can affect the digestive tract and cause you to lose your appetite. It is advisable to eat a little more often to make sure you receive adequate nutrition.

## WHEN SHOULD YOU CALL THE DOCTOR?

Your doctor can help reduce the side effects. In fact, several drugs have been added to your chemotherapy regimen to prevent side effects.

Some symptoms that you should report to your doctor is as follows:

- Fever above 38°C with chills and rigors
- Severe and prolonged vomiting.
- Bleeding or unusual bruising.
- Diarrhea or severe constipation.
- Prolonged pain.
- Difficulty breathing / shortness of breath.

## THINGS YOU CAN DO TO PREPARE FOR CHEMOTHERAPY

- Go to the dentist. This is especially true if you know you need dental work.
- Get a wig if you will need one.
- Wear comfortable clothing.
- Talk to your boss at work, it may be wise to discuss your chemotherapy situation with him or her.
- Arrange child care both during treatment and afterwards if needed.

Call for appointments:  
**Oncology Centre**  
03 2160 0344



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