



You may be worried about having chemotherapy but many people manage quite well during treatment. Ask your doctor or nurse about what to expect, and where you can get help and support.

What will chemotherapy be like?

Having chemotherapy is different for everyone. How you feel will depend on many different things including:

- the type of cancer you have
- the chemotherapy drugs you are given
- whether you have other treatments, like surgery or radiotherapy
- whether you have other health problems.

Some people may have to stay in hospital during their treatment or have to travel away from home for treatment.

However, many people can carry on with their normal life during chemotherapy. They may still be able to go to work, carry on with normal activities, and enjoy time with their family and friends.

Will I get side effects?

- Most people get some side effects during treatment.
- Side effects can be different for different people.
- They also depend on which chemotherapy drugs you are given.
- If you do have problems with side effects, ask your doctor or nurse how to manage these.

There may be days when you feel tired or sick.

- Try to rest when you feel tired.
- Be kind to yourself and take time to relax.

There may also be times when you feel emotional or have difficulty coping.

- Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Talk to someone about how you feel.
- Ask your doctor or nurse about what you can do.

! Useful tips

Getting help and support

- ✓ Know how to contact your doctor or nurse, or the hospital, for help and advice.
- ✓ Find out where to get advice about practical issues, like money problems.
- ✓ Find out where to get support if you are feeling anxious or depressed.
- ✓ Ask where you can get help if you need extra support, for example if you live alone or you have to travel for your treatment.

Chemotherapy and infection

- ✓ Learn how to reduce your risk of infection.
- ✓ Know you should call your doctor or nurse immediately if your temperature is 38°C or more, or you have other signs of infection

Chemotherapy safety

- ✓ Find out what safety precautions you should take at home during your treatment.

Treatment side effects

- ✓ Ask about any side effects you might get and how to manage them.

For more information see the patient information sheets at eviQ.org.au

Can I take other medicines?

Medicines are any drugs or substances that can affect your body. They include medicines that your doctor gives you a prescription for, as well as medicines you can buy without a prescription, like vitamins or treatments for headaches and colds.

Complementary and alternative medicines

Cancer treatments can include surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and targeted therapy. Sometimes people with cancer want to try other treatments. These are called complementary and alternative medicines (CAMs). They can include:

- vitamins
- dietary supplements
- homeopathy
- traditional medicines, like Chinese, Ayurvedic or Aboriginal bush medicine.

Some CAMs can interfere with your chemotherapy.

It is important to tell your doctor about any medicines you are taking, including CAMs, before you start cancer treatment.

Don't stop or start any medicines without asking your doctor.

What about vaccinations?

Vaccinations for you during chemotherapy

Some vaccinations are safe to have during chemotherapy and others are not. The flu vaccine is safe to have.

You should not have vaccinations that contain a live vaccine during treatment, or for at least 6 months after treatment. These include: BCG (tuberculosis), varicella (chicken pox); zoster (shingles); MMR (measles, mumps and rubella).

Vaccinations for your family

Your family members should have vaccinations as normal during your treatment, including live vaccines.

Rotavirus is a vaccination given to babies under 6 months old. Some of the vaccine can be in the baby's faeces (poo) for 2 weeks after the vaccination. If you are caring for a baby who has had this vaccine, try to get someone else to change the baby's nappies during this time.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

If you are a woman having chemotherapy you should not breastfeed during your treatment.

If you are having chemotherapy and someone caring for you is pregnant or breastfeeding, they should not touch any of your chemotherapy medications, or clean up any body fluids that might contain chemotherapy drugs.

Can I eat and drink normally?

It is important to try to keep eating during your treatment to keep your strength up.

- Try to eat a balanced healthy diet.
- Drink enough water – about 8 cups or 2 litres a day. (If you are fluid-restricted because of a medical problem, check with your doctor how much you can drink.)
- Ask your doctor or nurse whether it is safe to drink alcohol during your treatment.

Food safety

Some foods can carry germs that cause infections.

- You should learn what food is safe to eat during your treatment, and how to prepare and cook your food properly.

Eating and side effects

Some chemotherapy side effects can make eating and drinking difficult. These include:

- nausea and vomiting
- a sore or dry mouth or throat
- changes to taste and smell.

Ask your doctor or nurse for advice about how to manage these problems. You can also ask to see a dietitian if you are having trouble eating.

Sex and fertility

Your situation will depend on your age, relationship, and whether you are sexually active or not.

You may not feel like having sex during cancer treatment. There may be both physical and emotional reasons for this. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you are concerned.

Chemotherapy drugs can harm an unborn baby so it is important to use contraception if there is any chance that you or your partner could get pregnant. Talk to your doctor or nurse about which methods are suitable.

Some chemotherapy can affect your fertility. If you plan to have children in the future, it is important to get advice before you start your treatment.

Remember, talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions about your treatment.

Contact numbers:

Daytime:

Night/weekend:

Working together to lessen the impact of cancer

Cancer Institute NSW PO Box 825, Alexandria, NSW 1435

t +61 (0)2 8374 5600 f +61 (0)2 8374 3600 e information@cancerinstitute.org.au

www.cancerinstitute.org.au

