



A GUIDE TO YOUR TREATMENT

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Many people fear chemotherapy because they have heard that it can have uncomfortable side effects. But side-effect management has come a long way over the last few decades. Today, many side effects once associated with chemotherapy can be prevented or controlled. With some types of chemotherapy, you may experience only minimal side effects. And chemotherapy may be your best option for a successful outcome. You can help achieve a successful outcome by understanding how side effects can impact your treatment.

What is Chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy is the general term for any treatment involving the use of chemical agents to stop cancer cells from growing. Chemotherapy can eliminate cancer cells at sites great distances from the original cancer. As a result, chemotherapy is considered a *systemic* treatment. More than half of all people diagnosed with cancer receive chemotherapy. For millions of people, chemotherapy helps treat their cancer effectively, enabling them to enjoy full, productive lives.

Chemotherapy works by disrupting their ability to grow and reproduce. There are many different drugs used to treat cancer, and can be given in many different ways, such as:

- by mouth
- by injection into either a muscle or a vein
- by injection into the spine

The frequency of chemotherapy depends on the drug prescribed by your doctor, and your individual needs. Your doctor and the nurse will explain this carefully. Chemotherapy is usually given in the office, but it may be necessary to stay in the hospital so that the effects of the treatment can be carefully monitored.

How Long is My Chemotherapy Treatment?

The length of treatment will vary according to the type of medication you are to receive, and how well the chemotherapy is working. You may spend anywhere from 1 hour to 8 hours in the office on the day of your treatment, depending on the type of chemotherapy drugs that are being administered. The frequency of each treatment will vary according to the regimen your doctor has prescribed. Your doctor and nurse will discuss your chemotherapy treatment with you in detail.

How Does the Doctor Know if the Chemotherapy Treatment is Working?

Your doctor will examine you frequently, and ask how you are feeling and coping with the side effects. He will also perform blood tests, x-rays, or other tests such as a CT scan or an MRI to determine if your tumor has not grown and/or is getting smaller.

Why Does Chemotherapy Cause Side-Effects?

Chemotherapy drugs travel through the blood to all parts of the body. It is designed to help kill cancer cells, which grow and divide rapidly. However, chemotherapy can also affect normal cells in the body that also divide rapidly, such as the hair follicles, the lining of the intestine, and the bone marrow (red and white blood cells). When these healthy cells are affected, side effects can occur, such as hair loss or diarrhea.

Will I Have Side Effects from My Chemotherapy?

Patient reactions to chemotherapy may vary. Some people may experience very few side effects, whereas others may experience several side effects. The severity of a side effect can also vary, depending on the individual. Unfortunately, there is no way to tell how you will react to your chemotherapy; however, side effects can be controlled to minimize discomfort. As you progress through your chemotherapy treatments, you will learn how the chemotherapy affects your body, and how to deal with the side effects. **IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU LET YOUR DOCTOR AND NURSE KNOW WHEN YOU ARE HAVING SIDE EFFECTS.** Many people feel embarrassed about discussing their side effects with their doctor or nurse; however, we need to know how you are doing in order to give you the best possible care and prevent potentially serious or even life-threatening problems.

If you are feeling ill, it is best to consult with your CHOMG physician as soon as possible.

Some Common Side Effects of Chemotherapy.

Side effects can vary from drug to drug; therefore, your doctor will tell you what to expect. However, there are several common side effects that can be managed effectively:

1. *Nausea.*

Your doctor can prescribe anti-nausea drugs such as Zofran (Ondansetron) or Compazine (Prochlorperazine) to alleviate nausea and prevent vomiting. However, there are several useful tips to help manage nausea:

- Drink carbonated beverages such as ginger ale
- Ginger in any form is excellent for nausea and ginger tea is an easy effective measure
- Eat dry crackers or toast, especially after sleeping.
- Eat popsicles or Jell-O.
- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Avoid greasy or spicy food.
- Avoid strong food odors.
- Severe nausea and vomiting has been helped by acupuncture, hypnotherapy, and biofeedback.

2. *Diarrhea.*

Your doctor may prescribe anti-diarrhea medication such as Imodium. If you are experiencing more than three episodes of diarrhea in 24 hours, contact your doctor or nurse. Useful tips include:

- Drink plenty of fluids such as water or sports drinks.
- Avoid dairy products, such as milk.
- Avoid caffeine, such as caffeinated tea, coffee, cola drinks, chocolate.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Avoid citrus drinks such as orange juice.
- B.R.A.T diet: Bananas, Rice (white), Applesauce, Toast (plain)

3. *Constipation.*

Some anti-cancer drugs and pain-killers can cause constipation. Your doctor may prescribe a laxative such as Sennakot or Milk of Magnesia. Your doctor may also recommend glycerin

suppositories. You can also eat foods that are high in fiber such as bran cereals, fruit and vegetables. Increasing your fluid intake also helps with constipation. At least 6 glasses of water daily is recommended (except for patients on fluid restrictions).

4. *Dry mouth and Mouth Sores.*

Chemotherapy can sometimes cause dry mouth, or mouth sores. To relieve dry mouth:

- Eat hard candy to stimulate saliva production.
- Suck ice cubes.
- Eat moist foods.
- Drink plenty of water.

If you develop mouth sores, inform your doctor so that he may prescribe medication to treat these. In addition, you may also try the following tips:

- Rinse mouth frequently with salt water and baking soda gargles.
- Avoid mouthwashes that contain alcohol.
- Brush teeth with a very soft toothbrush such as a child's toothbrush.
- Eat foods that are easy to swallow, such as milk shakes, Ensure-type drinks, bananas, applesauce, scrambled eggs, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, baby foods and ice cream.
- Keep lips moist with lip balm.
- Swish mouth with sweet acidophyllous milk

5. *Hair Loss.*

While some chemotherapy drugs do cause complete hair loss, others only cause thinning, and some drugs do not affect the hair at all. Your doctor and nurse will tell you if the drugs you are taking will cause hair loss. Hair loss generally occurs between 10 - 14 days after your first chemotherapy treatment, and is first noticed as it accumulates on your pillow or in your hairbrush. Some patients experience itching or scalp discomfort as the hair is falling out, but this resolves once hair loss is complete. Patients with long hair may wish to cut their hair to a shorter style before hair loss occurs, and as the hair becomes patchy some patients opt to shave their head.

However, hair loss is temporary, and your hair will grow back soon after you discontinue chemotherapy. In the meantime, you may want to wear a wig, hairpiece, or hat. Your nurse can give you information about wigs and hats. It takes about four to six weeks for your hair to recover from chemotherapy. In general, you can expect about a quarter inch of growth each month. When your hair starts to grow back, it will probably be slightly different from the hair you lost. But the difference is usually temporary. Your new hair might have a different texture or color. It might be curlier than it was before, or it could be gray until the cells that control the pigment in your hair begin functioning again.

6. *Will I be able to have children?*

Women can stop menstruating either temporarily or permanently during chemotherapy.

Although it may be possible to conceive at this time, it is not desirable due to the harmful effects on the fetus; therefore, birth control is recommended. After chemotherapy, the ability to conceive will vary, depending on the type of chemotherapy you have received.

Chemotherapy often reduces the sperm count in men, causing temporary or permanent sterility; however, chemotherapy does not affect the ability to have an erection.

7. *Fatigue*

Fatigue, usually described as feeling tired, weak or exhausted, affects most people during cancer treatment. Cancer fatigue can result from the side effects of treatment or the cancer itself. For some people, cancer fatigue is mild and temporary. For others, cancer fatigue lasts months after treatment and makes going about daily activities impossible. Some fatigue during cancer treatment is to be expected. But if you find that cancer fatigue is persistent, lasting weeks, and interferes with your ability to go about your everyday tasks, tell your doctor.

Tell your doctor right away if you experience:

- Confusion
- Dizziness
- Loss of balance
- Inability to get out of bed for more than 24 hours
- Severe shortness of breath
- Worsening signs and symptoms

Because cancer-related fatigue may be caused by many factors, your doctor may suggest more than one method to reduce and cope with your symptoms. These may include self-care methods and, in certain cases, medications or medical procedures.

Medical interventions

Medications may be available to treat the underlying cause of your fatigue. For instance, if your fatigue is the result of anemia, blood transfusions may help. Medications that stimulate your bone marrow to produce more red blood cells might be another option, though this is controversial.

If you're depressed, your doctor might suggest medications that can help reduce fatigue, increase appetite and improve your sense of well-being.

Self-care options

Coping with fatigue might require things you can do on your own. You might try to:

- Take it easy. Set aside time in your day to rest. Take short naps – no longer than an hour – throughout the day rather than resting for one long period.
- Conserve your energy. Save your energy for your most important activities. Keep track of the times when you feel your best and plan ahead to do your important activities during those times. Ask for help when needed.
- Maintain your energy by eating. Drinking lots of fluids and eating well will help you keep your energy reserves up. Limit or avoid caffeine and alcohol. If nausea and vomiting make it hard to eat, talk to your doctor about these side effects.
- Get moving. When you feel up to it, light exercise throughout the week may help you preserve your energy level. But keep in mind that once you start feeling fatigued, it may be too late to start an exercise program because it's hard to find the energy to

get going. Instead, exercise regularly as you start treatment. You'll get in the routine of exercising, and it may even help you prevent fatigue during treatment.

De-mystifying Blood Counts

Your doctor and nurse may request a blood test each time you receive chemotherapy, called a Complete Blood Count, or CBC. This test is performed to check the function of the bone marrow. Bone marrow is the soft tissue found in the center of the bones, and manufactures the major cells found in the blood:

- White Blood Cells (WBCs) - the cells that fight infection
- Red Blood Cells (RBCs) - the cells that carry oxygen to the body
- Platelets - the cells that help clot the blood to prevent bleeding

Since chemotherapy can suppress the bone marrow's ability to produce these cells, ***it is important that a blood test be carried out BEFORE each chemotherapy***, so that your doctor and nurse can decide if it is safe to proceed with your treatment, and prevent the following complications:

1. Complications of Low White Blood Cells

Since White Blood Cells help the body to resist infection, low levels of the cells mean that the body has little resistance to infection, and you can become ill more easily. In order to prevent possible infections, the following measures can be taken:

- Avoid people with colds, infections, and contagious diseases
- Pay good attention to personal hygiene, wash hands frequently, especially after using the toilet and before eating
- Take special care of your mouth (see *Mouth Sores*)
- Wear work gloves to protect the skin on your hands
- Do not walk around barefoot
- Keep any cuts clean, and covered with Band-Aids
- Cook all foods thoroughly - if you wish to eat salads or fresh fruit, make they are washed thoroughly - preferably with a commercial vegetable rinse
- Neuro-feedback has been shown to enhance immune system functioning

Sometimes, your doctor may prescribe a special medication called Neulasta in order to boost your white cells. This is given as a small injection into the arm. If you receive Neulasta shots, you may experience bone aches, especially in the legs and back. If this occurs, you may take Tylenol every four hours. Avoid aspirin or ibuprofen, as these interfere with the blood's ability to clot.

2. Complications of Low Red Cells

Since Red Blood Cells carry oxygen to the tissues, a low RBC count means that the tissues do not receive enough oxygen, causing anemia. Your doctor will specifically talk about your Hemoglobin and Hematocrit levels, and these indicate how severe the anemia is. Fatigue is a common symptom of anemia; however, in some cases it is even possible to experience some shortness of breath or chest pain. Your doctor may advise several treatments, depending on your Hemoglobin and Hematocrit levels.

- Get plenty of rest and avoid strenuous activity

- Eating foods that contain plenty of iron, such as lean red meat, spinach and other dark green vegetables
- Iron supplements
- Special injections of PROCRIT or Aranesp, medications that stimulate the bone marrow to produce more Red Blood Cells. These shots are given in the arm or through the vein, three times a week for several weeks.
- Blood transfusion.

3. *Complications of Low Platelet Counts*

Since the Platelets help clot the blood to prevent bleeding, a low Platelet count results in the possibility of bleeding and bruising more easily. Your doctor may advise several treatments, depending on the Platelet Count:

- Avoid aspirin or aspirin containing medicines, ibuprofen and other anti-inflammatory drugs
- Avoid any activity or work that may lead to bruising
- Platelet transfusion.

What to Eat During Cancer Treatment (tips from MayoClinic.com)

Eating well may help you feel better during cancer treatment, and it may make it easier to tolerate your treatments.

You may find that cancer or cancer treatment has affected your sense of taste. Food may seem to lack flavor or taste too sweet, salty or metallic. Usually these changes are temporary and will improve with time. In the meantime, do what you can to maintain your calorie intake and meet your body's protein, vitamin and mineral needs.

If you normally follow a specific diet, such as one that's low in sodium or fat or designed for people with diabetes, it may be necessary to put those restrictions aside for a while. You'll want to allow for more variety so that you can increase your chances of getting adequate nutrition. Check with your doctor to make sure it's all right to loosen your dietary restrictions.

If food lacks flavor

Try different sauces, marinades, seasonings and other ingredients. These can help perk up the taste of food.

While cooking, add:

- Barbecue sauce
- Extracts or other flavorings
- Ketchup
- Meat marinades
- Mustards
- Salad dressings
- Soy sauce
- Spices and herbs
- Bacon bits
- Chopped green pepper
- Chopped onion
- Ham strips
- Nuts
- Cheese, especially Sharp Cheddar
- Teriyaki sauce
- Vinegar
- Wine

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Try:

- Extra sugar or syrup on your food. On your cereal, try brown sugar, maple syrup, honey, cinnamon, dates or raisins instead of white sugar.
- Extra salt. In addition, salty foods such as cured meats, cheeses and snack chips may have more taste.

If food tastes too sweet

Tone down overly sweet foods by:

- Adding a little salt or lemon juice
- Adding plain yogurt, buttermilk, instant coffee powder or extra milk to your milkshakes, instant beverage mixes or commercially prepared nutritional drinks

Try foods that are less sweet:

- Drink beverages such as diluted fruit juice, milk, buttermilk, lemonade, ginger ale or sports drinks.
- Choose less-sweet-tasting desserts such as yogurt, custard, pumpkin pie, fruit or fruit with cottage cheese, plain doughnuts, or graham crackers.

In place of sweet snacks, choose other foods:

- Cheese
- Chips or pretzels
- Cottage cheese
- Crackers
- Deviled eggs
- Nuts
- Peanut butter
- Sandwich spreads
- If syrup, jam or sugar tastes too sweet, try butter or margarine on cooked cereal, toast and pancakes.

If food tastes too salty

A little sugar may tone down the saltiness of some foods. Try bland, mild-flavored foods. Cook foods without adding salt or seasonings containing salt. Avoid processed foods that contain a lot of sodium. Look for products labeled reduced sodium or low sodium.

If meat doesn't taste right

If the meat is fresh and cooked properly, but it just doesn't taste right, serve other foods that contain protein, such as:

- Beans or peas in soups, salads, side dishes or as a dip
- Cheese
- Cottage cheese
- Custard
- Egg dishes
- Eggnog
- Fish — fresh, frozen or packed in a vacuum-sealed pouch, but avoid canned, as cans can give fish a metallic taste
- Instant breakfast-type drinks or other nutritional beverages
- Macaroni and cheese

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- Malts
- Milkshakes
- Nuts
- Peanut butter
- Poultry
- Pudding
- Yogurt

Other suggestions for meat:

- Try meat prepared in combination with other foods, such as chili, lasagna, spaghetti sauce, casseroles, stews or hearty soups.
- Try sauces, ketchup and other seasonings, which may improve the flavor.
- Try marinating meat, chicken or fish in marinades, soy sauce, sweet fruit juices, wine or Italian-style dressings.
- Try salty, spicy or smoked meats, such as ham, sausage, cold cuts or wieners.
- Try high-protein foods that may taste better cold or at room temperature. Examples include cheese or cottage cheese plates; macaroni salads with shrimp, ham or cheese; tuna, egg, ham or chicken salad; cold meat or luncheon meat sandwiches; or cold salmon.

If your cancer treatment has weakened your immune system, some of these foods may not be safe for you. Practice food safety by keeping foods at safe temperatures. Don't let perishable foods sit out for more than two hours. Avoid unpasteurized, raw or undercooked meats, cheeses or other dairy products. Wash all vegetables and fruits thoroughly and make sure everything is well-cooked. Avoid unsafe restaurants and salad bars! And ask your doctor for a referral to a dietitian who can help you understand more about food safety tips and techniques.

General suggestions

- Foods that look appealing often taste better.
- Vary the color, temperature and texture of foods.
- Garnish foods with a lemon wedge, orange slice, cherry tomato or sprig of parsley, and set an attractive table.
- Drink liquids often or use gum, mints or hard candies to remove a bad taste in your mouth.
- Try using plastic utensils if you have a bitter or metallic taste in your mouth when eating.
- Check with your dentist to see if you have any dental problems. Maintain good oral hygiene.
- Check with your doctor to see if your taste changes could be related to your medications.

What to do if you have questions

We understand that this is a very stressful period in your life, and the information you have received may sound complicated and alarming; however, all the staff at CHOMG are available to help you in any way that we can. A nurse is on site daily during our office hours, and she is happy to address any concerns about your treatment etc.

Your appointment schedule

You will have a scheduled appointment each time you come for your treatment, or come to see the doctor. These appointments are carefully arranged to ensure that all patients receive the highest standard of care and attention. We do encourage you to be prompt for your appointments, as a latecomer may affect the smooth operation of the office. In certain cases, you may be asked to reschedule to another day. If you cannot keep your appointment, please give the office plenty of notice so that you may be given another appointment.

What you should bring on treatment days

Your treatment time may vary from a few minutes for a simple shot, to 10 hours a day for five days, depending on the medication your doctor has prescribed. If you are going to be in the office for an hour or more, you may want to bring the following:

- ✓ Drinks such as ginger ale, ginger tea, other sodas (not cola), and water
- ✓ Snacks, sandwiches, soups, or a full lunch, depending on your needs
- ✓ Books, magazines, puzzles etc.
- ✓ A personal stereo, CD player or DVD player
- ✓ Loose-fitting clothing and comfortable shoes
- ✓ Your own blanket
- ✓ Arrange a ride home after your treatment - you may not feel like driving or taking the bus
- ✓ A spouse, relative or friend - we encourage one adult visitor per patient. For the safety of our patients, we ask that you leave children under sixteen at home.

Be A Partner in Your Care

One of the most fundamental ways of learning to live with cancer is to take an active part in your treatment. Be a partner in your care! When you are first diagnosed with cancer, or perhaps told that you have a recurrence, you may be overwhelmed with a series of new and difficult choices to make.

One of the best ways of getting more information regarding your diagnosis and treatment is to talk to your doctor and ask him lots of questions. The doctors at California Hematology Oncology Medical Group will explain your diagnosis and treatment very thoroughly; however, it is sometimes hard to remember what the doctor tells you. You may want to write down a list of questions to ask your doctor the next time you come to the office. Such questions include: "What type and stage of cancer do I have?", "What are the side effects of my treatment?", "Do I need a special diet?". You may also have additional questions to ask that your doctor will be happy to answer. It is also important to discuss with your doctor (or the nurse) any side effects of treatment you are experiencing, any physical changes, and any medications/supplements/herbs you are taking. In order to create the best treatment plan for you, your doctor will need to know as much as possible about you and your health.

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You may also check out our website: chomg.com for more information about chemotherapy and useful links to other resources. The website includes videos and podcasts about chemotherapy and cancer care.

In addition to the conventional treatments of chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, your doctor can recommend other therapies that can help you deal with the side effects of treatment, and improve quality of life, such as acupuncture or nutritional counseling. Joining a support group, such as those provided at the Wellness Community, can provide great support and comfort to those undergoing cancer treatment. You can locate your local Wellness Community through their national website: <http://www.thewellnesscommunity.org/>

In addition, you will most likely have to make lifestyle changes that will seem difficult at first, such as changing your diet or quitting smoking. The changes and choices you will make are not a temporary fix that can be stopped once your treatment is complete. They are a lifetime commitment. And remember, “The more you know, . . . the more you will be able to improve the quality of your life and enhance your sense of well-being.” (CancerOnline, 1997).

Good luck with your journey.