



## CHEMOTHERAPY FAQS

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CHEMOTHERAPY

#### What is chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy, often called “chemo,” is a type of treatment that uses drugs to treat cancer.

Sometimes the term chemo refers to the drug itself.

#### HOW DOES CHEMOTHERAPY WORK?

Chemotherapy works by destroying cancer cells, which grow and divide quickly. Chemotherapy may kill the cancer cells directly or allow the cancer cells to die by themselves, but prevent them from reproducing.

#### WHAT IS THE GOAL OF CHEMOTHERAPY?

Depending on your type of cancer and how advanced it is, chemotherapy can:

- **CURE CANCER** by destroying cancer cells to the point that your doctor can no longer detect them in your body and they will not grow back.
- **CONTROL CANCER** by keeping it from spreading, slowing its growth or destroying cancer cells that have spread to other parts of your body.
- **EASE CANCER SYMPTOMS** (also called palliative care) by shrinking tumors that cause symptoms such as pain or pressure.

#### WHAT TYPE OF CHEMOTHERAPY WILL I RECEIVE?

Your doctor will choose chemotherapy that is best for you based on the type of cancer you have, whether you have had chemotherapy before and your current health status, including other health problems you may have such as heart disease or diabetes.

#### WHERE WILL I RECEIVE CHEMOTHERAPY?

You may receive chemotherapy during a hospital stay, at home or in the outpatient clinic. Where you receive chemotherapy depends on the type of chemotherapy drug or drugs you will receive. Talk to your doctor or nurse for more information.



## HOW OFTEN WILL I RECEIVE CHEMOTHERAPY?

How often and how long you get chemotherapy for depends on many factors such as your type of cancer, the type of drugs used and how you react to the treatment. Chemotherapy may be given in “cycles,” a period of chemotherapy treatment followed by a period of rest. The treatment and rest period together make up one cycle.

## HOW IS CHEMOTHERAPY GIVEN?

Chemotherapy may be given in many ways. The most common are by injection, intravenously (directly into your vein) and by mouth such as a pill or liquid that you swallow. There are other ways that chemotherapy is given. The method depends mostly on the type of chemotherapy. Sometimes, chemotherapy is used as the only cancer treatment. But more often, you will get chemotherapy along with surgery, radiation therapy or biological therapy.

## WHAT SIDE EFFECTS WILL I HAVE?

The side effects you experience depend on the kind of chemotherapy you are getting and the dose. The most common side effect is fatigue, feeling exhausted and worn out. Other common side effects include nausea, diarrhea and low blood counts. Ask your doctor or nurse about the side effects you may have with your chemotherapy. Also, discuss what you can do if you experience them.

## WILL I LOSE MY HAIR?

Hair loss will depend on the type of chemotherapy, the frequency of doses and how aggressive the treatment is. There is no way to tell if someone will lose hair during chemotherapy. Some people do not lose hair or only have a slight thinning. Others may lose all of their hair. The good news is that hair usually grows back once treatment stops.

## CAN I TAKE OVER-THE-COUNTER AND PRESCRIPTION DRUGS WHILE I GET CHEMOTHERAPY?

Take only drugs that are approved by your doctor or nurse. Some drugs can affect the way chemotherapy works. Tell your doctor or nurse about all the medications you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications and any recreational drugs you may use.

## CAN I TAKE VITAMINS, MINERALS, DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS OR HERBS WHILE I AM ON CHEMOTHERAPY?

Some of these products can change how chemotherapy works. For this reason, it is important to tell your doctor or nurse about all the vitamins, minerals, dietary supplements and herbs that you take before you start your chemotherapy treatments.

## CAN I TELL THAT CHEMOTHERAPY IS WORKING BY THE SIDE EFFECTS I HAVE?

You cannot tell if chemotherapy is working based on its side effects. Some people think that severe side effects mean that chemotherapy is working well. Or that no side effects mean that chemotherapy is not working. The truth is that side effects have nothing to do with how well chemotherapy is fighting your cancer. Your doctor will give you physical exams and medical tests (such as blood tests and X-rays) to determine your response to the chemotherapy.

## WILL CHEMOTHERAPY AFFECT MY ABILITY TO HAVE CHILDREN?

Chemotherapy treatments may cause temporary or permanent infertility. These side effects are related to a number of factors, including your gender, age at time of treatment, the specific type and dose of chemotherapy, the use of single therapy or many therapies, and length of time since treatment. **It is important to discuss your concerns with your doctor before treatment starts.** You should also discuss your options for fertility preservation and procreative alternatives, if needed.

## WHAT ARE CLINICAL TRIALS AND ARE THEY AN OPTION FOR ME?

Cancer clinical trials test new treatments for people with cancer. City of Hope conducts many clinical trials that offer the latest treatment available, but are unproven. If you are interested in participating in a clinical trial, please speak with your doctor.

## WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

At City of Hope, the Sheri & Les Biller Patient and Family Resource Center offers resources for information, education and support for patients receiving chemotherapy. The center is located near the entrance to the Main Medical building, or you may call **626-256-4673, ext. 3CARE (32273)**. Ask for the booklet “Chemotherapy and You” from the National Cancer Institute. You may also get information directly from the National Cancer Institute ([cancer.gov](http://cancer.gov)) and the American Cancer Society ([cancer.gov](http://cancer.gov)).

