

NETCARE
cancer care

Cancer care discharge information leaflet

Chemotherapy



Providing YOU with the best and safest care

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01 Welcome

Each person has a unique physical and emotional response to receiving chemotherapy as no two people are the same.

The side effects caused by different chemotherapies may also differ, so it is important not to compare your response to somebody else's.

Questions to consider before you go home

- Do you live alone?
- Do you have someone to take you home?
- Do you have friends and/or family to help you when you are at home?
- How do you manage with personal care, e.g., bathing and washing?
- Will you be able to prepare your own meals at home?
- Are there stairs in your house and will you manage to get up and down them safely?
- Do you have any pets at home that need care?
- Have you received any medication to take home, and are you sure that you know how to take it?
- Are you able to open the lid or cap of a container and express tablets from blister packs?
- Do you have the emergency contact details of your healthcare team?



02

What to expect at home

Many people do not feel any different in the first few hours after receiving chemotherapy. However, you may experience side effects, caused by the medication after a few hours and possibly after a few days. It is important to know what to expect and how to manage the side effects at home.

Please ask your nurse or healthcare practitioner to provide you with a FREE copy of the Netcare information booklet called “**Chemotherapy side effects and how to manage them**”. This booklet provides a practical guide on how to manage distressing symptoms. Please always remember to let your oncologist or nurse know if you are not coping at home or have any additional questions.

03

Self-care tips at home

Some patients feel it is quite daunting to be at home and not under the direct supervision of a healthcare practitioner all the time. Our goal is to help you feel confident as you regain your independence and learn new self-care measures at home.

Rest

Many patients experience a change in their sleep pattern, which contributes to increasing levels of fatigue. Try to get a good night’s sleep. One way to sleep better is to be active during the day and then slow all activities down before bedtime. Examples of calming activities may include reading, working on a jigsaw puzzle or listening to music. A warm bath or a warm drink before bedtime may also help you to relax. Plan time to rest by taking short naps or rest breaks between activities. Use meditation, prayer, gentle yoga, guided imagery, and visualisation to relax and decrease stress.

Exercise

Exercise is really good for you but try not to do too much. Stay active but choose the activities that are most important to you and bring you joy. Examples may include going for a short walk, riding your bike, or doing yoga. Set time aside to focus on breathing deeply.

Eat and drink well

It may be easier to eat if you have five or six small meals each day, rather than three large ones. Eat plenty of protein and calories when you can, which will help you keep up your strength and rebuild tissue harmed by chemotherapy. Eat the foods that sound good to you even if there is not a lot of variety at first. You may want to drink a liquid meal replacement for extra nutrition.

It is important to be adequately hydrated and get sufficient fluid in, even when you don't have an appetite. Most adults need at least 8-12 glasses (about 2 litres) of fluid a day and this amount increases if you are experiencing excessive fluid loss through diarrhea, perspiration etc.

Please ask your nurse or healthcare practitioner to provide you with a FREE copy of the Netcare information booklet called "Eating hints: before, during and after cancer treatment". This booklet offers healthy eating guidelines which may be helpful.

Let others help you

Don't feel that you can't ask for help! Home care staff, family members and friends can assist with household chores, running errands or driving you to and from appointments. They might also help by cooking meals for now or to freeze for later.

Learn from others who have cancer

People who have cancer can help each other by sharing ways they manage at home. One way to meet other people with cancer is by joining a support group – either in-person or online. Speak to your healthcare practitioner to learn more about support groups in your area.



04

Safe handling and storage of oral chemotherapy at home

Chemotherapy prepared in any form (intravenous, injection, tablet or cream) needs to be handled very carefully. Please take note of the following tips:

- Store your chemotherapy pills in a safe place where children and pets cannot reach them.
- Oral chemotherapy pills should stay in their original package until you are ready to take them as the original packaging helps to clearly identify them.
- You will find specific storage instructions for that specific medication in the package insert, e.g. refrigerate, store in dry/cool place etc. Some medication needs to be kept away from direct sunlight.
- Ensure the medication you are taking has not expired. The expiry date can be found on the packaging.
- DO NOT allow the pills to drop onto countertops/tabletops. If they do, clean the area well with soap and water to avoid contact with any possible residue/powder from the spilt chemotherapy, which could be harmful to others and/or to pets.
- When possible, handle the pills yourself. Take the pills from a cup, the bottle cap or try to wear gloves when handling.
- Wash your hands before and after taking your pills.
- If a caretaker is giving you your pills, they should wash their hands before and wear disposable gloves when handling your medication, which should be placed in a cup/spoon for you to take. If you or the caretaker comes into contact with the drug, wash your hands well with soap and water.
- DO NOT crush/break/split/chew your pills.

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- If you skip/miss a dose do not take another dose. Take the next dose at the appropriate time. If you are not sure what to do, call your doctor straight away.
 - If you vomit up a dose, do not take another dose. Take the next dose at the appropriate time with anti-nausea tablets that have been prescribed by your doctor.
 - If you mistakenly taken an extra dose, call the doctor right away.
 - DO NOT dispose of extra pills in the trash, toilet or sink.
 - Please do not throw empty chemotherapy pill bottles in the trash.
 - DO NOT recycle empty chemotherapy pill bottles.
 - Small amounts of chemotherapy will be excreted in your stool, urine and vomit for up to 48-hours after the drug has been administered. Traces of chemotherapy will also be found in your blood. Please advise caution when handling soiled objects (linen, toilet seat etc.).
 - After using the toilet, close the toilet lid prior to flushing the toilet TWICE. Wipe any splashes with disinfectant or if your caretakers has contact with your body fluids, they should wear disposable gloves.

Alert

- A pregnant caregiver should NOT handle oral chemotherapy or be exposed to chemotherapy spills or contaminants.
- Should you discover that you are pregnant whilst on chemotherapy treatment, please report this to your treating oncologist immediately.
- As your ability to fight off infections may be lowered in-between chemotherapy treatments, try to avoid people who may be sick with diseases or illnesses that you could catch, like colds, flu, measles or chickenpox.

05 Management of unused oral chemotherapy drugs

Please inform your oncologist that you are returning unused medication.

- Please return medication in its original container in a tight sealed transport container.
- This container may not be used again.
- Return the unused chemotherapy drug to the outpatient chemotherapy unit, where it was dispensed.
- Hand the container over to the mixing pharmacist or nurse in charge of the unit. The unused chemotherapy will be checked by the pharmacist before being disposed of in special tightly sealed cytotoxic waste bins, made for this purpose.



06 When to call the doctor

Should you experience any of the following, or if you are unsure about anything, please contact:

Your oncologist (during office hours):

The following emergency number (after hours):

Contact your treating oncologist if you experience:

- Unexplained bleeding such as blood in urine, stools or vomit and unusual bruising under your skin
- Extreme fatigue that is not improving
- A cough that is getting worse and/or shortness of breath
- Rapid irregular heartbeat or chest pain
- Abdominal pain
- Inability to eat or drink
- Signs of jaundice: skin and whites of eyes that appear more yellow than normal
- New rash or an existing rash that is getting worse
- IV insertion site e.g., on your arm or port that feels hot, painful and/or swollen
- Burning when passing urine
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Fever > 38°C

Additionally, please do not hesitate to speak to your doctor or nurse about your physical and/or emotional pain (it does not have to relate to cancer or its treatments). There are many pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions that may bring you relief. Sometimes just talking to someone who listens may be comforting.

07 Follow up after chemotherapy

Please remember that you will still need to have regular check-ups with your oncologist and treating team. Please make sure that you know when your next appointment is and whether you need a blood test before the appointment.

Your next appointment is:

Do you have a completed blood form for blood tests? YES / NO

It is completely normal to be anxious before an appointment, especially if you are waiting for news or results from blood tests, scans, or X-rays. Please speak to us if you require additional support.





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