

Understanding Chemotherapy

Knowing what chemotherapy does, and when and how it is given, may make you feel less anxious about starting treatment. Chemotherapy can be a single medication or a combination of medications. It may be used along with surgery or radiation therapy to shrink a tumor or prevent its spread.

How Chemotherapy Works

Chemotherapy kills growing cancer cells. More than one medication may be used. This allows the growing cells to be attacked at more than one stage of growth. Side effects occur because chemotherapy acts on normal cells, too. Fast-growing cells are most affected. This includes cells that make up hair, the digestive tract, and blood. Chemotherapy is given in cycles. After a treatment, time is set aside for the body to build healthy cells before the next cycle begins.

The Goals of Chemotherapy

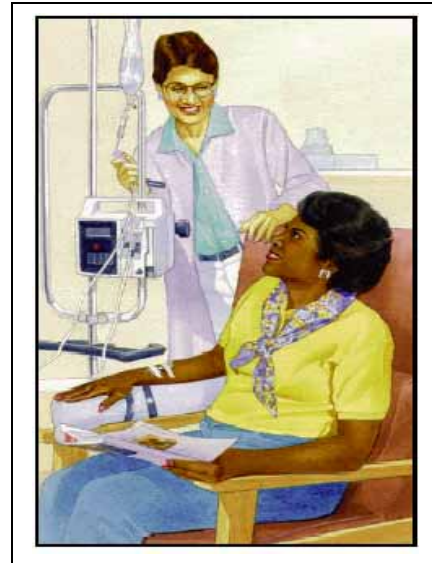
Chemotherapy can reduce the number of cancer cells. As a result, it may:

- Cure cancer
- Cause remission (no active symptoms of disease)
- Kill any cancer cells remaining after surgery
- Control cancer for a period of time
- Reduce symptoms (such as pain)

Risks and Complications

There are some risks with chemotherapy, but the benefits usually outweigh the risks. The following are possible long-term side effects of some types of chemotherapy:

- Infertility
- Organ damage (heart, kidneys, liver, lungs)
- Lasting nerve damage
- Another cancer, which may occur at a later time



Common Questions:

1. Will I Still Be Able to Work?

Many people do still work during chemotherapy. If you find you have less energy, you may need to talk with your employer about adjusting your schedule.

- Work at home or reduce the number of hours you work.
- Plan time off that fits best with your treatment cycle.

2. Should I Exercise?

Ask your doctor about starting an exercise program. It may help you sleep better and sometimes even helps control nausea. It is also good for your sense of well-being.

- Exercise when you feel most energetic.
- Keep the pace moderate. Even small amounts of exercise can help. Instead of jogging, walk or ride a stationary bike.

