

# Chemotherapy

## Information Sheet



### What is chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy is a drug treatment that uses strong medicines to kill harmful cells in your body.

Chemotherapy is often used to treat cancer.

You may hear chemotherapy called “chemo”.

### What does chemotherapy do?

Chemotherapy can be used alone or with other treatments to cure cancer, control cancer or ease cancer symptoms.

Chemotherapy drugs travel throughout the body.

Chemotherapy works by killing cancer cells, stopping the spread of cancer cells or slowing the growth of cancer cells.

### How is chemotherapy given?

Chemotherapy can be given in different ways:

- An injection through a vein (IV) or artery (IA)
- A shot into a muscle or another part of your body
- A pill or liquid that you swallow
- A cream that is rubbed on your skin

Your doctor will determine which chemotherapy drugs to use depending on:

- Your type of cancer
- The stage of cancer (how far the cancer has spread)
- Your general health
- Your treatment goals



### Is chemotherapy safe?

Chemotherapy has been used to safely treat patients for more than 50 years. In that time, much has been learned about the safest and most effective ways to give chemotherapy.

Before you begin chemotherapy, your chemotherapy oncology team will develop a plan, just for you.

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## What are the side effects of chemotherapy?

Each person responds differently to treatment. It's not always possible to tell how you will feel. Some people feel well enough to keep up with their normal schedules at home or work. While some people take time off of work or lighten their schedules.

Side effects depend on your type and stage of cancer, the type and amount of chemotherapy you are getting and your health before treatment.

Some symptoms you may have are:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Hair loss
- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue or feeling tired
- Mouth sores



Many of these side effects can be treated or prevented. Most side effects stop after treatment. Talk to your doctor to learn what side effects you may have and how to manage them.

## Where can I get more information?

The National Cancer Institute provides accurate and up-to-date information about clinical trials, cancer types, prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship and end of life care.

**Phone:** 1-800-4CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

**Website:** [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

The Rural Cancer Network (RCaN) offers other user-friendly, cancer educational handouts. For more information about questions to ask your doctor about chemotherapy, please see the "Chemotherapy: Questions to Ask Your Doctor" handout.

**Website:** [www.ruralcancernetwork.org](http://www.ruralcancernetwork.org)



**Carbone Cancer Center**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH



[ruralcancernetwork.org](http://ruralcancernetwork.org)



**Cancer Health  
Disparities Initiative**

**For more local information, please contact:**

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