

Chemotherapy for Cancer

Chemotherapy or “chemo” is treatment with strong medicine that can kill cancer cells. Chemo is used to treat many types of cancer, but not everyone who has cancer will get chemo.



How does chemo work?

Chemo works by harming cancer cells and trying to kill them. It also harms or damages some normal healthy cells. This is because chemo can't always tell the difference between a normal cell and a cancer cell. But, normal cells will usually get better or be replaced with new, healthy cells after some time.



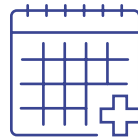
How is chemo given?

Many types of chemo are given as an infusion through an IV line that is put into a vein. Other types can be given as a shot or injection, or taken as a pill. Chemo can be the only treatment that's needed for some cancers. Or, sometimes it can be given with other treatments like surgery, radiation, hormone therapy, targeted therapy, or immunotherapy.



Where do people go to get chemo?

Chemo is often given in an outpatient clinic or treatment center. For some chemo treatments, a person might need to stay in the hospital for a day or more. Only certain types of chemo can be taken at home.



How often is chemo given and how long does it last?

Because each person's treatment is different, how often it is given and how long it lasts can be different, too.

Chemo is often given in cycles. This means the chemo is given and then followed by a period of rest. This period of rest allows the body to recover from side effects before the next treatment is due.

For example, chemo might be given for one or more days during a week, followed by a couple weeks of rest. The number of days or weeks a cycle lasts can be different and depends on the type of chemo that's given. The number of chemo cycles given can be different, too.



Getting ready for chemo

If chemo is part of your treatment, talk to your health care team about what to expect. This will help you plan for changes in your work or family schedule if needed.



Side effects of chemo

Chemo harms some normal healthy cells, which can cause side effects. Because side effects depend on the chemo that's given, not everyone getting chemo will have the same side effects. Some side effects might happen during or right after getting chemo, while others might happen after a few days, weeks, months, or years after treatment.

Some common side effects include:

- Nausea or vomiting
- Hair loss
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Feeling weak and tired
- Fever or chills
- Low blood cell counts that might put you at higher risk for infections or bleeding
- Changes in taste or appetite
- Skin problems
- Mouth pain or mouth sores
- Other problems, depending on the type of chemo you're getting



Questions to ask

Here are some questions you can ask your doctor and health care team:

- What chemo drugs will I get?
- How often will I get treatment?
- Will I have rest periods between treatment cycles?
- How long will my treatment last?
- Where will I go to get my treatment?
- Can I drive myself to treatment?
- Will I need other types of treatment?
- What side effects could I have?
- How will my side effects be managed and what can I do about them?
- Can I continue taking my other medications or supplements during treatment?
- Will my insurance pay for my treatment? How much will I have to pay?
- Will I be able to work and do my regular activities during my treatment?
- What can I do to take care of myself during treatment?
- Are there any special things I need to do to protect myself and others while I am getting treatment?
- When should I call the doctor or nurse?

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at **cancer.org/chemotherapy**.
We're here when you need us.

