

CHEMOTHERAPY RECORD BOOKLET

Please bring this booklet to all hospital appointments and any admission to the Emergency Department. Show the booklet to your general practitioner, dentist, district nurse or breast care nurse when you see them.

Name _____

Patient hospital number _____

Consultant _____

APPOINTMENTS

[illegible]

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HOW TO CONTACT US IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR CHEMOTHERAPY

Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm

Andrew Love Cancer Centre

Ph: 4215 2700

After hours

Heath Wing 2, Geelong Hospital

Ph: 4215 2666

Community team telephone numbers

General practitioner

Ph: _____

District nurse

Ph:

Breast care nurse

Ph: _____

Other

Ph: _____

YOUR CHEMOTHERAPY DETAILS AND INFORMATION

Chemotherapy protocol _____

Diagnosis _____

Frequency of treatment _____

Proposed number of treatments _____

Date treatment started _____

Drug sensitivities _____

Venous access device _____

CHEMOTHERAPY AND SIDE EFFECTS

What is chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy is a form of drug treatment used to treat your disease. There are many different chemotherapy drugs in common use. Sometimes they are given singly and sometimes in a combination. The decision about which treatment to offer you will be based on many factors but will mainly depend on what your disease is.

How and where will the treatment be given?

Most chemotherapy is given through a drip into a vein in your arm (or sometimes into a major vein via a semi-permanent 'central line' such as a Hickman Line or Porta-cath). Some chemotherapy can be given in other ways, for example, as tablets. Many of our treatments can be carried out in the Chemotherapy Day Unit but some more complex treatments must be given as an inpatient.

How will you feel while you are having the chemotherapy?

Some chemotherapy drugs have very few side-effects and patients can often carry on living their normal everyday lives between visits. Other treatments may be more disruptive. It depends on the type of chemotherapy you are having, each drug is different. Some of the more common side-effects of chemotherapy are discussed in the next few pages but for more specific information about your particular treatment, please see the individual fact sheets which your nurse specialist will supply. Fact sheets will provide further details.

Nausea and vomiting (feeling sick)

You may be surprised to learn that not all chemotherapy drugs will make you feel or be sick. When we use the ones that do, we always give anti-sickness drugs to try to prevent the problem. Improvements in these drugs over the last few years means that many patients do not feel sick at all, or only have minor problems. If you are given anti-sickness tablets to take for a few days after your treatment, do make sure you take them as prescribed. It's much better to prevent sickness before it starts. If despite this you do feel sick after chemotherapy, let us or you're GP (family doctor) know. We can usually try different anti-sickness drugs to help.

Hair loss

Many chemotherapy drugs do not cause hair loss but others cause hair thinning or even complete hair loss. Again it all depends on which chemotherapy drugs you are having. Your doctor and nurses will be able to tell you how likely hair loss is with your treatment.

If it happens, hair loss will usually start about two to three weeks after the first treatment. It is important to say that the hair always grows back after the chemotherapy stops.

We realise that, for some people, the thought of losing their hair temporarily is very upsetting. If your chemotherapy is likely to cause hair loss, we will be able to arrange a wig fitting for you. Some patients use scarves, turbans or colourful hats to help cope until their hair comes back. If you would like more information about hair care while you are having chemotherapy, please ask your nurse specialist for information about the Look Good Feel Better Program.

Tiredness

The most common side-effect of chemotherapy is tiredness. This affects some people more than it does others. If you do feel tired or lethargic, try to balance getting plenty of rest with making sure you carry on with some of your usual activities. Do what you feel up to. There are few restrictions on work, sport or social and sexual activities, though it is common to feel less enthusiastic about these than usual. These restrictions can be discussed in further detail with your specialist nurse.

Fertility

It is important that you do not become pregnant or father a child while on chemotherapy as the drugs may damage your unborn child. Chemotherapy often makes you temporarily infertile but this can be unpredictable, so it is very important that you continue to use contraception. Sometimes the infertility is permanent. Men who are concerned about this should ask about sperm storage before treatment starts. Women who are still having periods may notice changes in their normal pattern. Sometimes the periods stop or there may be less blood loss. Fertility will be discussed with your treating team and you can always consult your treating specialist nurse for further information and support.

Taste changes

Patients often tell us that chemotherapy gives them a strange taste in their mouth. Sometimes food may seem tasteless and it is quite common for tea and coffee to taste different. This is temporary and your taste will return to normal. You can try mints or peppermints to help take away the temporary taste in your mouth caused by the chemotherapy.

Sore mouth

Chemotherapy can make your mouth more sensitive and it may become sore or infected. Some people find that they have mouth ulcers. Regular brushing with a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste after meals and before going to bed is very important and is the best way to prevent infection. It is also recommended that you regularly rinse with a basic salt water mouth wash. This can be easily prepared at home. Please avoid all mouth washes/ rinses containing alcohol. If your mouth does become sore, please discuss this with your doctor or nurse. It also a good idea to go for a check-up at your dentist before you start your chemotherapy.

Altered bowel habit

The drugs may affect your bowel and your normal bowel habits may alter, for example, you may get diarrhoea or constipation. Please tell your doctor or specialist nurse if this becomes a problem, don't suffer in silence as it is usually very easy to resolve.

Appetite

There are few restrictions on what you can eat and drink while on chemotherapy. A 'little of what you fancy' when you fancy it is always a good policy. Alcohol is generally also allowed in moderation but do check with your pharmacist or specialist nurse first.

Phlebitis (sore veins)

Some drugs have to be injected very carefully into your veins otherwise they may cause damage to your skin (extravasation injury). This is why the nurse takes such care with the injections. You may experience some discomfort and hardening of a vein which has been used but if you develop severe pain and redness at an injection site contact the chemotherapy nurse.

THE EFFECTS OF CHEMOTHERAPY ON YOUR BLOOD

One thing that all chemotherapy drugs have in common is they tend to lower your resistance to infections. This is because they lower your blood count, especially your white blood count. When you have less white blood cells than usual you are less able to protect yourself from infections. This doesn't mean that you need to isolate yourself from other people, though it is sensible to avoid close contact with those who have obvious coughs, colds, flu and so on.

What should you do if you get an infection?

If you develop any of the following while you are on chemotherapy – and for four weeks afterwards – you should ring us for advice immediately:

- A temperature (above 38°C on two occasions 1 hour apart or 39°C on one occasion)
- A sore throat
- A chesty cough
- A stomach bug or upset stomach
- A urine infection (cystitis)
- Feeling generally unwell, achy or flu-like
- Redness or discharge around a Hickman or other central line
- Shivery episodes after flushing a Hickman or other central line.

**DONT DELAY! It is very important to act straight away.
Contact us on Ph: 4215 2709.**

If you see your GP, show them the letter on page 10 of this booklet.

Other effects of a low blood count

Platelet count: Platelets are blood cells which help clot your blood. With most chemotherapy low platelets are unlikely to cause a problem, but if you have any unusual bleeding or bruising please let us know.

Red blood count: Red blood cells help to carry oxygen to your muscles and organs around your body. A low red blood count can make you feel tired and short of breath. From time to time we offer patients blood transfusions to correct a low red blood count.

Blood tests during chemotherapy

We will usually ask you to have a blood test before going ahead with each treatment to make sure your blood count has recovered after the last chemotherapy treatment. Your doctor will ask you to attend your local pathology collection centre the day before each treatment.

Please read the information sheet about your treatment for more specific potential side effects.

INFORMATION FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

Your illness may affect your family and friends. You may like to share the Cancer Council information booklets named Understanding Chemotherapy with them. It will be helpful if close family or friends know the effect of chemotherapy on your blood and what action to take if you get an infection.

Family and friends often want to help and support you. You may find it useful to have practical help with shopping, housework, visits to the hospital or collecting the children from school. You could ask one person to co-ordinate help and telephone calls to see how you are doing.

Don't be afraid to identify times when you want quiet time or days when you don't feel well enough for visits and phone calls. If you are feeling isolated or finding it difficult to cope, talk to the nursing staff so that professional support can be organised if necessary. We have disease-specific booklets you may like to read before or during your treatment. There are also booklets of a more general nature;

- Sexuality and cancer
- Understanding complementary therapies
- Caring for someone with cancer
- Understanding cancer fatigue
- Managing depression

Concerns and suggestions

If you have any concerns about your care or treatment, please let us know immediately. You can talk to your specialist nurse or the unit nurse manager. Most concerns can be addressed straight away. You can also speak to a doctor if you have any problems.

This is for you to show to your GP or the Emergency Department if you develop an infection while you are on chemotherapy.

ADVICE FOR GPs AND EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT STAFF

This patient has been undergoing chemotherapy treatment at:

- The chemotherapy is likely to cause a low white count particularly neutropenia. If the patient consults you regarding any form of infection while they are receiving chemotherapy we advise that an URGENT SAME DAY full blood count should be carried out and that the following guidelines be considered:
 - / If Neutrophils $< 1.0 \times 10^9/l$ and the patient is febrile ($> 38^\circ C$), admit to hospital for IV antibiotics.
 - / If neutrophils $> 1.0 \times 10^9/l$ and patient is febrile but well consider oral antibiotics after clinical assessment.
 - / If neutrophils $> 1.0 \times 10^9/l$ and the patient is febrile and clinically unwell please liaise with hospital doctor on ph. 4215 2700

Please do not hesitate to contact us for advice. Ring the hospital switchboard and ask for the registrar – see the front of this booklet to identify the appropriate consultant team. During office hours, if the registrar is not available ask for the nurse manager.

USEFUL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

eviQ

Cancer treatments Online
www.eviq.org.au

Leukaemia Foundation

Geelong Office
Ph: 5222 5977
www.leukaemia.org.au

Myeloma Foundation of Australia Inc

www.myeloma.org.au

Australian Red Cross Blood Service

www.redcross.org.au

Transfusion Nurse

Ph: 4215 2700

Cancer Council Helpline

Ph: 13 11 20
www.cancervic.org.au

Beyond Blue

Depression & anxiety
Ph: 1300 22 4636
www.beyondblue.org.au

McGrath Breast Care Nurse

Ph: 4215 2700

Breast Care Network Australia

www.bcna.org.au

Ovarian Cancer Australia

Ph: 1300 660 334
www.ovarian.cancer.net.au

Fertility Options for young women Counsellors

Ph: 03 9344 2057
(9.00am 5.00pm)

Melbourne IVF

Reproductive Service

Redkite

Community based support
Ph: 1300 722 644
www.redkite.org.au

CanTeen

www.canteen.org.au

Cancer Care Coordinator

Ph: 4215 2700

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