

# Chemotherapy:

## A Guide for Odette Cancer Centre Patients

Providing the Right Education,  
to the Right People, in the Right Way  
at the Right Time.

- Patient Education Program, Odette Cancer Centre



**Sunnybrook**

ODETTE CANCER CENTRE

A Cancer Care Ontario Partner when it matters  
**MOST**



### **Who Do I Call With Concerns?**

- During the hours of 9:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, you can call your primary nurse.
- After hours and on weekends and holidays, call Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre at 416.480.6100 ext. 4244 and ask for the oncology resident on-call.
- If your treating physician is one of the gynecologic oncologists, after hours, weekends and holidays, see your family physician, or go to your nearest Emergency Department.

# Chemotherapy:

## A Guide for Odette Cancer Centre Patients



### Contents

- Introduction..... 1**
  
- Your Treatment Team..... 2**
  
- What is Chemotherapy? ..... 4**
  - When is chemotherapy used? ..... 4
  - How does chemotherapy work? ..... 4
  - What is biotherapy? ..... 4
  - How long is my treatment plan? ..... 4
  - How long is each chemotherapy treatment?..... 5
  - How is chemotherapy given? ..... 5
  - What if my veins are not strong enough for IV injections? ..... 5
  
- What Will Happen on the Day of Treatment? ..... 6**
  - Step 1: Arrive prepared ..... 6
  - Step 2: When you arrive ..... 7
  - Step 3: Before your chemotherapy ..... 7
  - Step 4: Pharmacy prepares your chemotherapy ..... 8
  - Step 5: At the time of your treatment ..... 8
  - Step 6: All finished!..... 9
  
- Who Do I Call With Concerns?..... 10**

<b>What are the Side Effects of Chemotherapy?</b> .....	10
Nausea and vomiting .....	11
Effects on the blood .....	12
Fatigue.....	13
Loss of appetite.....	15
Soreness or discomfort in the mouth .....	15
Soreness or discomfort in the stomach .....	16
Hair loss.....	17
Sexuality .....	18
Fertility .....	20
Change in bowel habits.....	20
Changes in bladder function.....	22
Skin changes.....	22
Other changes.....	23
<b>Other Questions About Chemotherapy</b> .....	24
Will chemotherapy be painful?.....	24
Is there any reason that I would not receive a chemotherapy treatment? .....	24
What about other types of treatment?.....	24
What are clinical trials? .....	24
Will chemotherapy affect my lifestyle? .....	25
What should I eat? .....	25
What about smoking? .....	26
What if I have to go to the emergency room?.....	26
Can I work during treatment? .....	26
How will I feel emotionally?.....	27
What about my appointments? .....	27
<b>When You Have Finished Your Treatment</b> .....	28
Odette Cancer Centre Patient Education Resource Centre .....	28
Websites.....	28
MyChart™ .....	29
Parking.....	29

# Introduction



*At the Odette Cancer Centre, we understand the impact a diagnosis of cancer can have, and our goal is to provide the best possible care and support for patients and their family members.*

For over 25 years, the Odette Cancer Centre (formerly Toronto Sunnybrook Regional Cancer Centre) has been a leader in the diagnosis, treatment and care of those with cancer. We are the sixth largest comprehensive cancer centre in North America, fully affiliated with the University of Toronto and a partner of Cancer Care Ontario.

Our Chemotherapy Treatment Team work together to provide patients with the best possible treatment, helping patients take charge of their individual situation through support and education.

This book will help you with some of the questions you may have about chemotherapy treatment at the Odette Cancer Centre at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. It contains general information about chemotherapy, general side effects, sources of support and more. Your team will explain your own treatment plan to you as everyone's situation is different. We encourage you to talk with your treatment team about any questions that you may have.

**Maureen Trudeau, MD, FRCPC**

Head, Division of Medical Oncology/Hematology,  
Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre

Head, Systemic Therapy Program, Sunnybrook Odette Cancer Centre  
Professor, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto

# Your Treatment Team

The care we provide at the Odette Cancer Centre is tailored to the needs of each individual patient. Your treatment team work together to provide the best care, education, and support.

## Your Treatment Team may consist of the following healthcare professionals:

**Doctors:** The Odette Cancer Centre provides a multidisciplinary approach to treatment. The medical staff at the Centre are specialists in preventive, radiation, medical and surgical oncology. Physicians further specialize in specific cancer types.



- **Surgical Oncologists** are physicians that perform surgical procedures related to cancer such as biopsies and removal of lumps or tumours.
- **Radiation Oncologists** are physicians that treat cancer with radiation treatments.
- **Medical Oncologists** are physicians that treat cancer using medications, such as chemotherapy.

**Primary Nurses** work with medical oncologists to help you and your family identify your individual needs and make decisions about your care.

**Chemotherapy Nurses** will give your chemotherapy. They will also explain and answer any questions about your chemotherapy side effects and anti-nausea drugs.

**Pharmacists** provide information to you and your family about your medications. They will make sure you receive the correct medications and help you get the most benefit from your treatment.

**Drug Reimbursement Specialists** can help you to access medications not covered by Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) by exploring other drug coverage options.

**Registered Dietitians** can help you deal with eating problems, weight changes, special diets and the use of nutritional supplements.

**Psychologists/Psychiatrists** can help you and your family deal with issues related to cancer including: distress and difficulties coping, stress, and changes in relationships.

**Social Workers** can help you and your family cope with changes due to cancer and treatment and they can help you to access a range of community support services.

**Students:** Since we are a teaching hospital, you may meet students from any of the above professions.

**Blood Lab Technicians** will draw your blood and test it before any drugs can be given.

**Volunteers** can help you to be as comfortable as possible in the chemotherapy unit in a number of ways including getting blankets or drinks or just sitting and talking with you.

# What is Chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy is the treatment of cancer with drugs.

## When is chemotherapy used?



- Chemotherapy may be used alone or together with other forms of treatment such as surgery or radiation therapy.
- Chemotherapy is used to control and sometimes cure the cancer.

## How does chemotherapy work?

Cancer cells divide and multiply in an uncontrolled way. Chemotherapy affects these cells' ability to grow and divide. Chemotherapy can destroy the cancer cells or not allow cells to grow.

## What is biotherapy?

Biotherapy is a new form of treatment for certain cancers and these drugs are most often given with chemotherapy. Biological drugs cause few side effects as they specifically target cancer cells and not the normal healthy cells in your body.

## How long is my treatment plan?

Chemotherapy treatment plans usually include many cycles. Each cycle includes the treatment day and the recovery days after treatment.

Your plan will depend on:

- The type of cancer you have
- Side effects
- How the cancer responds to the drugs



## How long is each chemotherapy treatment?

The treatment time will vary depending on the type of drugs you receive. The time can range from 10 minutes to 6 hours.

## How is chemotherapy given?

The way you receive your chemotherapy will depend on the kind that is prescribed for you. You may receive chemotherapy at the Odette Cancer Centre as an outpatient or you may be admitted to the hospital.

### **Chemotherapy is given:**

- By mouth as a tablet or capsule
- By intravenous (IV, into the vein)
- By needle injection under the skin or into the muscle



## What if my veins are not strong enough for IV injections?

The nurse will check to see if you are at risk for problems in your veins when the drugs are being given. If you are at risk, your chemotherapy nurse and medical oncologist will speak to you about a Vascular Access Device. This device allows for good vein access to safely deliver your treatment. Your nurse and medical oncologist will recommend the type of **Vascular Access Device** that is most suited to your needs. This will be based on the type and length of your treatment and how your drugs will be delivered.

### **There are three different types of Vascular Access Devices:**

- **P.I.C.C. (peripherally inserted central catheter):** This is placed into one of the veins in the area of your inner arm above or below your elbow. The end of the catheter hangs outside the skin.
- **Port-a-Cath (catheter and port):** This device is placed into your upper chest, under the skin.
- **Hickman Catheter:** This is placed into a large vein in your upper chest. The end of the catheter hangs outside the skin.

# What Will Happen on the Day of Treatment?

Your first day of treatment may seem overwhelming. There are a lot of new people to meet and a lot of information that will be reviewed with you. In addition, you will receive written instructions to take home explaining how to manage the side effects related to the chemotherapy. You may also receive prescriptions for medications that will help reduce or manage these side effects. Our chemotherapy staff at the Odette Cancer Centre will support you throughout your treatment so you can know what to expect before, during and after each cycle of chemotherapy.

**This section will explain the steps you will go through on the day of your treatment.**

## Step 1: Arrive prepared

- Bring any medications you take during the day with you (ex: pain medicine, blood pressure medicine, Insulin or puffers).
- Eat a light breakfast.
- Be prepared for a long day with some waiting between steps.
- Bring a snack/lunch or beverage, or these may be bought at the on-site Cafeteria.
- Wear comfortable clothes, with sleeves that can be easily raised to have your blood taken and an IV inserted.
- You may bring one family member or friend into the chemotherapy suite. It is helpful to have someone with you to support you and collect all of the information you will receive.
- Bring your health card (OHIP), drug insurance card and cash or credit card to pay for possible prescriptions.



*The Drug Reimbursement Specialist can help cancer patients to access medications not covered by Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) by exploring other drug coverage options. To speak with the Drug Reimbursement Specialist, you can visit the Patient and Family Support Program in T-wing, Ground floor TG-230 or call 416.480.5000 ext. 7864.*

## Step 2: When you arrive

- All patients must check in at the main reception on the first floor.
- If you are told that you need blood work before treatment, you will be sent to the blood work lab, which is located beside the main reception.
- Take a number from the tray located by the lab doorway and attach it to your red hospital card and put it back on the tray.
- If you are having chemotherapy on the same day as your blood work, check-in to the Chemotherapy suite after your blood is taken.
- If you are not having chemotherapy on the same day as your blood test, check into the chemotherapy unit after checking in at the main reception.
- Please be patient, as the results from your blood work will take at least 1 hour.

## Step 3: Before your chemotherapy

- The nurses will check your blood work results and make sure that you are feeling well.
- On your first visit, your height and weight will be rechecked.

## Step 4: Pharmacy prepares your chemotherapy

- The pharmacy will prepare your chemotherapy as ordered by your medical oncologist. This could take up to 1.5 hours so please be prepared to wait.
- You may need to go to the outpatient pharmacy to pick up a medication to help you with nausea before you start chemotherapy.
- The pharmacy is located on the first floor.



*Bring your drug insurance information if you have a drug plan and money (cash, cheque, credit card) for any needed prescriptions.*

## Step 5: At the time of your treatment

- Please note: We request that you do not use cell phones in the chemotherapy suite.
- You will be brought into a room with comfortable chairs or beds, depending on the length of your treatment.
- An intravenous line will be inserted into your vein. The chemotherapy will be given through this line.
- The nurse will teach you about the chemotherapy you will be receiving, the possible side effects and answer any questions you may have.
- Medication may be given by mouth or intravenously before the chemotherapy to prevent side effects.
- The nurse will check on you frequently to make sure you are not having any reactions from the drugs.
- Depending on what treatment you are receiving, the nurse and other treatment team members may need to check your blood pressure, heart rate or temperature regularly.
- A pharmacist will speak with you during your treatment about any chemotherapy and anti-nausea pills that you take home with you and their side effects. The pharmacist can offer suggestions of how to deal with the side effects and will also answer any questions that you may have. You can watch television, read, eat or just relax while your treatment is being given.

- You may have additional prescriptions that you need to pick up from pharmacy. These can be collected by a friend or family member while you are in treatment. Please remember these prescriptions need to be picked up by 4:45 pm.

## Step 6: All finished!

- Your intravenous line will be removed.
- You can pick up your drugs to take home and ask any questions you have about your treatment at the pharmacy. If a pharmacist has not visited you during your treatment, they will now talk with you about any pills you will be taking at home and their possible side effects. They will also answer any questions that you may have related to your medications. If your treatment is going to finish after pharmacy closes, and there is no family or friends to pick up your medication, the pharmacist will come into the chemotherapy suite before 5:00 pm to talk with you.
- Once you return home, you can call your primary nurse with any questions or concerns you may have.

# Who Do I Call With Concerns?

- During the hours of 9:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, you can call your primary nurse.
- After hours and on weekends and holidays, call Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre at 416.480.6100 ext. 4244 and ask for the oncology resident on-call.
- If your treating physician is one of the gynecologic oncologists, after hours, weekends and holidays, see your family physician, or go to your nearest Emergency Department.

# What are the Side Effects of Chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy treatments fight the cancer cells in your body. Sometimes the chemotherapy can harm normal, healthy cells as well as cause side effects. Side effects are almost always temporary. People receiving the same chemotherapy treatments may not experience the side effects in the same way.

This section will explain the common side effects of chemotherapy and provide suggestions for helping you to manage them.

## **Specific side effects depend on:**

- The type of cancer being treated
- The length of the treatment
- The dose of the medication
- The drugs being used

## Nausea and vomiting

Nausea is when you feel queasy or sick to your stomach; vomiting is when you throw up. Nausea and vomiting symptoms may begin within hours after the chemotherapy drugs are given and may last for several days.

### **Nausea and vomiting can be caused by:**

- Your chemotherapy treatment
- Your cancer
- Constipation



### **How to manage nausea and vomiting after chemotherapy:**

- Take your medications for nausea and vomiting exactly as directed by your medical oncologist.
- Do not wait for nausea to get worse before taking your medication.
- **Phone your medical oncologist, primary nurse or pharmacist if nausea is severe, lasts longer than 48 hours, your antiemetics are not working or you have vomited several times in that day.**
- Eat small meals often and slowly.
- Avoid hot, fatty or spicy foods.
- If the smell of certain foods makes you feel sick to your stomach, try to have someone else cook the meal or eat the food cold.
- After eating, relax, but do not lie down flat.
- Drink lots of fluids.



*You can talk with a Registered Dietitian if you are experiencing any nutrition problems related to nausea or vomiting or you have questions or concerns about your diet. They can be reached through the Patient and Family Nutrition Resource Centre, located on the ground floor of the Odette Cancer Centre or you can call them at 416.480.4623.*

## Effects on the blood

As chemotherapy attacks the cancer cells, it may affect your red blood cell, white blood cell and/or platelet counts. This is why you have regular blood tests done during treatment.

Your chemotherapy team will monitor your blood counts each time you come for treatment and let you know what your counts are. If your counts are too low on a given day, your treatment may be delayed to the next week.

**Red blood cells** carry oxygen from your lungs to other parts of your body. When there are not enough red blood cells you may get tired or short of breath more easily.

- People with cancer often have a lower than normal amount of red blood cells. This is called mild anemia.
- Mild anemia needs no treatment and disappears once chemotherapy stops.
- If your anemia worsens, your medical oncologist may prescribe a treatment such as a blood transfusion or a medication to increase your red blood cell count.

**White blood cells** fight infections. When your white blood cell count is low, you are more likely to get an infection.

- Check with your cancer doctor before having any vaccinations, dental work or surgery while you are receiving chemotherapy.
- Tell other doctors or dentists that you are being treated with chemotherapy before you receive any treatment from them.



### **If you have a fever:**

- If you feel chills, a sore throat or a fever, take your temperature. If you have a fever over 38°C or 100°F, call your doctor or primary nurse immediately.
- If you are unable to reach your medical oncologist or nurse, you should go to the nearest Emergency Department.
- **Do not take acetaminophen (Tylenol) to treat the fever unless you first discuss with your nurse.**



**Platelets** are responsible for clotting your blood. If your platelets are low because of chemotherapy, you are at risk for bruising or bleeding.

- Be extra careful when using a knife or any other sharp object.
- Let your medical oncologist or nurse know if you notice any bleeding that does not seem to stop.



### Ways to reduce infection and injury:

- Talk to your medical oncologist about getting a flu shot.
- Wash your hands often with soap, especially before eating and after using the toilet.
- Apply body lotion to prevent breaks in the skin.
- Keep fingernails and toenails clean and short.
- Use an electric razor when shaving body hair.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.



## Fatigue

Fatigue is described as more than feeling tired. The feeling of fatigue does not go away after a rest or a good night sleep. Some of the signs of fatigue you may experience include getting tired quickly from doing normal things like taking a shower, cooking, going for a short walk, climbing stairs or having difficulty with your concentration or your memory. If you feel you are experiencing fatigue please share this with a member of your cancer health care team.

### **Fatigue may be caused by:**

- The cancer or the treatment
- Medications
- Stress
- Feeling worried or sad
- Pain
- A low red blood count (anemia)
- Nausea or vomiting
- Changes in your weight
- Changes in your diet
- Changes in your sleep habits



### Here are some of the ways you can manage fatigue:

- Try to take a walk or do some other type of light exercise every day.
- Rest as often as you need by taking short naps or breaks.
- Eat a well-balanced diet, including protein rich foods such as dairy products, fish, meat, poultry, legumes, nuts and seeds.
- Try to continue your normal activities as much as possible but rest as needed.
- Decide what activities are the most important to you each day and do those first.



*You can talk with a Registered Dietitian if you want more information and advice about nutrition choices to help with fatigue or you have questions or concerns about your diet. They can be reached through the Patient and Family Nutrition Resource Centre, located on the ground floor of the Odette Cancer Centre or you can call them at 416.480.4623.*

## Loss of appetite

You may not feel like eating for a few days after chemotherapy. If you can, try to eat small amounts of food as this can ease some of your side effects and give you energy.



### Things to encourage your appetite:

- Eat small meals frequently.
- Eat when you are hungry and keep healthy snacks on hand.
- Take a walk before you eat. Exercise can improve your appetite.
- Ask friends or family to help with preparing meals. Freeze some meals in smaller portions for when you do not feel like cooking.
- Make eating pleasant. Eat with friends, listen to quiet music, whatever makes you feel good.
- **Talk to a Registered Dietitian who can provide more information and advice or if you have any questions or concerns about your diet. They can be reached through the Patient and Family Nutrition Resource Centre on the ground floor of the Odette Cancer Centre or you can call them at 416.480.4623.**



## Soreness or discomfort in the mouth

The cells that line your mouth and throat can be damaged by the chemotherapy and can make eating difficult.

### Chemotherapy can cause:

- Dryness in the mouth
- A sore mouth, tongue or throat
- Mouth sores
- Infection in the gums, mouth or throat



### Things you can do to prevent or reduce mouth problems during chemotherapy:

- Drink at least 8 cups of liquid daily (unless told not to by your doctor). One cup = 250ml = 8oz.
- Keep your mouth moist by sucking on popsicles, ice cubes or sugar-free candy or by chewing gum.
- Moisten your lips with lip balm or with Vaseline to prevent cracks.
- Rinse your mouth and gargle frequently with baking soda and water (1 teaspoon baking soda in 8 ounces of water), at least four times per day especially after eating and at bedtime.
- Brush your teeth gently after eating and at bedtime with a soft toothbrush.
- Floss gently at least once daily.
- Brush and rinse dentures after eating and at bedtime. Remove dentures at bedtime and have loose dentures adjusted.
- Limit hot, spicy and acidic foods (such as tomatoes and citrus fruits), caffeine, alcohol and tobacco.
- Inspect your mouth every day if it is sore. Check for red or white patches, which could be a sign of infection and notify your medical oncologist or primary nurse.



### Soreness or discomfort in the stomach

Chemotherapy can have an irritating effect on the stomach. If you have a history of ulcer or problems with acid or heartburn, discuss your concerns with your primary nurse or medical oncologist.

#### **Inform your doctor or primary nurse if you are suffering from:**

- Indigestion
- Heartburn
- Excessive gas
- Stomach pain



### Here are some ways to manage your symptoms:

- Limit hot, spicy and acidic foods (tomatoes, citrus fruits), caffeine, alcohol and tobacco as they worsen the problem.
- Discuss medication options with your medical oncologist or pharmacist.



*You can talk with a Registered Dietitian if you are experiencing any nutrition problems related to nausea or vomiting or you have questions or concerns about your diet. They can be reached through the Patient and Family Nutrition Resource Centre, located on the ground floor of the Odette Cancer Centre or you can call them at 416.480.4623.*

## Hair loss

Chemotherapy can affect healthy, fast growing cells like those found in your hair.

### Here are some important things to know about hair loss:

- How much hair you lose depends on what chemotherapy you receive.
- You may lose all of your hair, have some thinning of your hair or you may not lose any hair.
- Hair loss can happen in all parts of your body including eyebrows and eyelashes.
- Hair loss can start within days or weeks of chemotherapy treatment.

Your hair will grow back when the chemotherapy treatments end (or perhaps in between treatments). It may take two to five months for your hair to grow back.



### To help deal with hair loss:

- Consider getting a short haircut or a wig before you start treatment.
- Wig Services are available within the Odette Cancer Centre, through the Canadian Cancer Society Volunteers, Complimentary Wig Service (416.480.6003) or the Continental Hair Wig Salon (416.480.5157) located in the T-Wing, Basement Floor.
- You can attend the **Look Good Feel Better** program at the Odette Centre (416.480.5000 ext. 7891) or through **Wellspring** (416.480.4440).
- Avoid hairspray, bleaches, blow dryers, dyes or perms while receiving chemotherapy.
- Protect your scalp from the sun by covering your head with a wig, hairpiece, scarf, or hat.
- If you lose your eyelashes and eyebrows, protect your eyes from dust and grit with a broad-brimmed hat and glasses.

## Sexuality

Sexuality is one aspect of our need for closeness, touch, caring and pleasure. You may have a decrease in desire for sex due to feelings of worry, changes in your body image or if you are having side effects of chemotherapy. Medically, unless told otherwise, you do not have to stop having sex. If you are having vaginal, oral or anal sex you may be told to use some sort of barrier method (e.g. condom) to protect your partner from risk of irritation. The irritation can be caused by small amounts of the chemotherapy sometimes staying in bodily fluids.

### Here are some things to consider:

- It is common for people receiving chemotherapy to have periods of disinterest in sex.
- The ability to feel pleasure from touching, hugging and cuddling may become more important than sexual intercourse.

- Your infusion catheter will not be damaged during sex as long as the dressing is not rubbed or opened.
- Talk to your partner about your concerns and why you are not interested in sex while you are receiving chemotherapy. Usually, your interest in sex will return after you complete your treatments.

## Birth Control

- Chemotherapy may damage sperm and may harm an unborn child if used during pregnancy.
- A form of birth control must be used while you are being treated with chemotherapy.
- Tell your medical oncologist immediately if you or your partner becomes pregnant.
- DO NOT breastfeed while undergoing treatment.

## Hormone Changes in Women

Chemotherapy can affect hormone levels in women, leading to changes in the way sexual organs function.

### Women may experience:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| • irregular menstrual periods                                 | • painful or uncomfortable intercourse |
| • loss of menstruation  | • change in sexual desire or enjoyment |
| • menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, or vaginal dryness |  |



*If you are concerned about issues related to sexuality and would like to have professional help or advice our social work service or psychology service is available for you through our Patient and Family Support Program at 416.480.5000 ext. 7864.*

For more information about how to deal with sexuality issues during cancer treatment, contact the Canadian Cancer Society: [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)

## Fertility

- Some chemotherapy drugs can cause infertility (not able to get pregnant) in women by putting them into an early menopause. Men can also be affected by specific drugs.
- Talk to your medical oncologist about fertility risks associated with your chemotherapy plan.
- You may be referred to a fertility clinic or sperm bank if needed.

## Change in bowel habits

Both constipation (difficulty having a bowel movement) and diarrhea (loose, watery stools three or more times a day) can be side effects of certain chemotherapy drugs. Both should be discussed with your medical oncologist or primary nurse if these persist for more than a few days.

### **Constipation**

#### **Constipation can be caused by:**

- Chemotherapy drugs
- pain medications
- Eating habits
- reduced activity

#### **Symptoms of constipation are:**

- Less frequent bowel movements
- need to strain to pass bowel movements
- small, hard or firm stools
- stomach ache or cramps
- bloated stomach
- feeling of fullness or discomfort
- passing more gas than usual or belching
- nausea or vomiting

It is important for your comfort and health that you move your bowels at least every two or three days.





### Here are some ways to avoid constipation:

- Drink 8-10 cups of fluid per day.
- Increase fiber in your diet (whole grain breads, high fiber cereals and bran).
- Stay active.
- Discuss the need for laxatives with your medical oncologist or primary nurse.

## Diarrhea

### Symptoms of diarrhea are:

- Loose or watery stools three or more times daily
- Abdominal cramps
- Pain
- Bloating
- Sore skin in the anal area from frequent movements
- Excess water loss (dehydration)

### Important things to remember about diarrhea:

- Notify your primary nurse or medical oncologist immediately if you have three or more loose watery stools in 24 hours.
- Take prescribed medications to control the diarrhea exactly as directed.



### Here are some ways to help manage diarrhea:

- Drink 8-12 cups of clear liquids (water, juice, soup and energy drinks) each day.
- Do not drink beverages that contain caffeine or alcohol.
- Try using lactose-reduced milk or other choices such as soy milk.
- Avoid spicy, fatty or fried foods.
- Avoid high fiber foods (whole grain breads, high fiber cereals and bran).
- Eat bland, low fiber foods like bananas, white rice, applesauce and toast.
- As the diarrhea improves, add foods such as pasta, baked potatoes, chicken and crackers.



*You can talk with a Registered Dietitian if you are experiencing any nutrition problems related to diarrhea or you have questions or concerns about your diet. They can be reached through the Patient and Family Nutrition Resource Centre, located on the ground floor of the Odette Cancer Centre or you can call them at 416.480.4623.*

## Changes in bladder function

- Many drugs are removed from your body through the kidneys and bladder. Drinking 8-10 cups of fluids each day helps to flush the drugs through your body.

Some drugs may irritate your bladder. Call your primary nurse for the following:

- If you have pain while passing urine.
- If you feel the need to pass urine often.
- If you pass urine in small amounts.
- If you see blood in your urine.

Some chemotherapy drugs will cause your urine to change color. This colour change is temporary and will not cause you any harm.

## Skin changes

**Some chemotherapy drugs can cause minor changes in your skin such as:**

- Redness
  - Rashes
  - Itching
  - Peeling
  - Dryness
  - Acne
  - Increased sensitivity to the sun
- Usually the side effects disappear on their own a few weeks after treatment ends.
  - Some drugs can cause more severe effects. If you are receiving one of those drugs, your primary nurse or doctor will give you more information about skin changes.

- Sometimes, the chemotherapy drugs can irritate your vein as they are being infused. The skin around your vein may turn dark. This skin change will get better on its own.



### Here are some ways to protect your skin:

- Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 25 or higher to protect against skin damage.
- Cover skin with clothing as much as possible.
- Use lip balm with SPF 15 or higher.



### Other changes

- Your nails may become darkened, yellow, brittle or cracked. You can use nail-strengthening products that are found in drug stores but these products may irritate your skin or nails. Talk to your medical oncologist or primary nurse if this becomes bothersome.
- Your eyes may become dry or irritated. If you have changes in your vision, tell your medical oncologist or primary nurse.
- You may experience numbness, tingling or a “pins and needles” feeling in your fingers or toes. It may be difficult to do up buttons or pick up small objects. Though this is temporary, it is important to inform your healthcare providers if you have these symptoms.
- Some drugs can potentially cause damage to your heart muscle which can affect how well your heart can pump blood to your lungs. You may need to have a heart test before you start treatment to make sure your heart muscle is working well. You may also need this test repeated while you are on treatment.



*For more information about side effects please see the **websites** section of this guide.*

# Other Questions About Chemotherapy

## Will chemotherapy be painful?

- Most patients do not feel anything unusual while they are receiving chemotherapy.
- Everyone is different and if you begin to feel uncomfortable, tell your chemotherapy nurse immediately.

## Is there any reason that I would not receive a chemotherapy treatment?

- Before each treatment, your nurse will check your blood work and ask you about any side effects you had after your last treatment. These two factors will help your team decide whether it is safe for you to receive further treatment.
- If your blood counts are low or you are having side effects from the chemotherapy, your treatment may be delayed or the dose of the drug reduced. You may be given another medication to improve your blood counts throughout your treatment.

## What about other types of treatment?

- Chemotherapy can be given with other types of treatment such as radiation or surgery.
- Alternative, complimentary or herbal therapies must be discussed with your medical oncologist, primary nurse, and the pharmacist. These therapies could interfere with the way chemotherapy works and/or cause harmful side effects.

## What are clinical trials?

- Clinical trials are also called cancer treatment studies or research studies and they test how well new treatments work in people with cancer.

- These treatments can include new drugs, new approaches to surgery and radiation therapy, new combinations of treatments, or new methods such as gene therapy.
- The goal of this research is to find better ways to treat cancer and to help cancer patients.
- If there is a trial that could help treat your cancer, your medical oncologist will discuss this with you.
- Ask your healthcare team about specific trials that might be helpful in treating your cancer.

### Will chemotherapy affect my lifestyle?

- You are encouraged to continue doing your usual daily activities as much as possible.
- Continue to do things that you enjoy.
- Mild or moderate exercise can be helpful during treatment.
- If you wish to take a holiday during your treatment, please discuss this with your medical oncologist.
- If you need to change your chemotherapy schedule, please discuss it with your primary nurse.



### What should I eat?

- You should eat a light meal just before your treatment.
- You may find that it is more comfortable to eat smaller meals more often.
- You will be told to drink plenty of fluids.
- A well-balanced diet can ease some side effects. It will also give you energy. We encourage you to contact the Patient and Family Support Nutrition Resource Centre for advice. They are located in TG-261 and can be reached at 416.480.5000 ext. 3438.

## What about smoking?

Quitting smoking after a diagnosis of cancer can have many benefits. It is important to remember that smoking during chemotherapy and radiation therapy has been known to increase side effects. We know that quitting can be hard. With the help of a counselor and quitting aids, you may be able to quit. If you would like to talk to someone about quitting, please let your healthcare team know.

## What if I have to go to the emergency room?



**If you ever need to go to the Emergency Room, make sure you bring these things with you:**

- A complete list of all of your medications, as well as your chemotherapy drugs and date of last dose.
- Name of your medical oncologist, primary nurse and their contact phone numbers.
- Your cancer diagnosis.

## Can I work during treatment?

- Yes, if you feel well enough to work, you may do so.
- If you are unable to work, take any disability forms you have to the Health Record Department at the Odette Cancer Centre. You will be asked to sign a release form and your forms will be given to your doctor for completion.
- If you have questions about your disability forms, please contact the Health Records Department (416.480.4638).
- If you have any difficulties accessing or completing forms you can contact the Patient and Family Support Program (416.480.4623).
- Wellspring offers an eight-week educational support program for members who are back at their jobs. For more information please contact Wellspring Odette House at 416.961.1928.

## How will I feel emotionally?

It is normal to have many different feelings during chemotherapy including fear, worry, anger or a feeling of relief that you are moving forward with treating your cancer.

- This can be a very emotional time and many people need help dealing with these feelings.
- Share how you feel with people you can talk to such as friends, family, your treatment team, a social worker, a psychologist, a spiritual and religious caregiver, or a support group.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- For more information, contact the Patient and Family Support Program (416.480.4623), or Wellspring, a network of centres for cancer patients and families providing emotional and educational support (416.480.4440).

## What about my appointments?

- Chemotherapy treatments are given Monday through Friday. The Unit Coordinators (receptionists) will book your treatments.



### **Here are some reminders to help us be as efficient as possible:**

- Let the nurse know if you have any other appointments in the cancer center (e.g. radiation, surgery).
- At each visit we will check your name, address or date of birth.
- Please be on time for your appointments.
- Although we try to treat patients as close to their appointment time as possible, there may be delays due to unforeseen situations or emergencies.

# When You Have Finished Your Treatment

- Your side effects will gradually go away. This will take weeks to months to occur.
- Your medical oncologist will discuss follow up care with you at your follow up appointments.
- If you have questions after your treatment is over, call your primary nurse.
- You may experience many conflicting feelings after treatment from relief to sadness. You may feel alone now that you are no longer seeing your treatment team so frequently.
- If you need support beyond friends and family, call your primary nurse to discuss the support services available to you or call Wellspring Cancer Support Network services (416.480.4440).

## Need More Information?

### [Odette Cancer Centre Patient Education Resource Centre](#)

The Patient Education Program at the Odette Cancer Centre can help and support you in finding resources and information about cancer, treatment and support. Please contact us by calling 416.480.5000 ext. 7739 or email at [patienteducation@sunnybrook.ca](mailto:patienteducation@sunnybrook.ca)

### Websites



**Please visit the websites below to find out more about cancer services, cancer information and information about chemotherapy:**

- [www.sunnybrook.ca](http://www.sunnybrook.ca)
- [www.wellspring.ca](http://www.wellspring.ca)
- [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)
- [www.chemoready.ca](http://www.chemoready.ca)
- [www.cancercare.on.ca](http://www.cancercare.on.ca)



## MyChart™

MyChart™ is a secure online website where patients can get:

- Personal health information
- Test results
- Appointments

For more information about MyChart™, call 416.480.6794 or visit: [www.sunnybrook.ca](http://www.sunnybrook.ca) and look for MyChart™ “Learn More”.

## Parking

Parking is available with daily rates, discount pay-per-use for non-consecutive days and discount weekly passes for consecutive days. Please contact the Parking and Transportation Services office at 416.480.6100 ext. 4123 for more information.

# My Notes & Questions

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



2075 Bayview Avenue, T-Wing  
Toronto, ON Canada M4N 3M5  
tel: 416.480.5000  
[www.sunnybrook.ca](http://www.sunnybrook.ca)



**Sunnybrook**

ODETTE CANCER CENTRE

*A Cancer Care Ontario Partner* when it matters  
**MOST**