

## General information about chemotherapy – Patient Information

This document provides information about chemotherapy and how it may affect your daily life. You will also receive specific information about your chemotherapy treatment.

### What is chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy is a type of cancer treatment that works by stopping or slowing the growth of cancer cells.

### Why is this treatment recommended?

Depending on your type of cancer and how advanced it is, chemotherapy can be used in different settings. Chemotherapy is used to cure cancer, control cancer, and ease cancer symptoms. Chemotherapy can be given along with other cancer treatment modalities; such as surgery, radiation therapy, targeted therapy or immunotherapy. Chemotherapy can make a tumour smaller before surgery or radiation therapy, destroy remaining cancer cells after surgery or radiation therapy, help radiation therapy and immunotherapy work better, and destroy cancer cells that have come back or spread to other parts of your body. It is important that you know the purpose of your treatment.

### How does treatment take place?

Many different chemotherapy drugs are available, and the drugs can be used alone or in combinations, to treat a wide variety of types of cancer. Most commonly, chemotherapy is given intravenously (injection into a vein), or as pills/capsules. Chemotherapy is often given in cycles. A cycle is a period of chemotherapy treatment, followed by a period of rest. The rest period allows your body to recover. You will receive a detailed treatment plan.

### What are the side effects of chemotherapy?

Every person experiences chemotherapy differently, both physically and emotionally. How you feel depends on your general health, your type of cancer, how advanced your cancer is, and the chemotherapy regimen you are receiving. Side effects occur because chemotherapy also harms healthy cells. The most common side effects are decreased blood cell count, nausea, fatigue, hair loss and mouth sores. The effect of the treatment is the same regardless of whether you get side effects or not.

Healthy cells have a greater ability than cancer cells to repair damage caused by chemotherapy. For this reason, the side effects often go away after chemotherapy. However, some patients experience long-term side effects of chemotherapy, so-called 'late effects'. Late effects include a wide range of

conditions, with varying severity and duration. Some of these late effects may go away, while others may be permanent. Some people experience late effects several years after end of treatment. If you experience late effects, it is important to contact a healthcare professional. You can reduce the risk of late effects by following general health advice, and avoid smoking, obesity, inactivity, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

## Food

You can eat a normal diet during treatment. During and the first days after chemotherapy, we recommend that you have small meals that are easy on the stomach. Chemotherapy can reduce appetite, and cause nausea and altered taste sensation. If you experience this, let us know, so we can help you. It is important that you get enough energy, protein and fluids before and during cancer treatment. If you want to lose weight, you should wait until chemotherapy treatment is finished.

With regard to the risk of infection, good food-hygiene and hand-hygiene are important when handling raw food and before eating. You should rinse fruits, berries and vegetables thoroughly (berries from abroad should be heated). Do not eat raw meat or fish, nor mature or mold cheese. It is considered safe to eat sushi in Norway, due to the short shelf life. Fermented trout (Rakfisk) should be avoided completely. Eggs from an approved Norwegian egg packing plant can be eaten. Try to drink water, preferably at least two litres a day. This will help you excrete waste products after chemotherapy.

Whether you can drink alcohol during chemotherapy depends on the medication you use. During treatment it is generally okay to drink small amounts of alcohol; however alcohol may interfere with how some types of chemotherapy work. You will receive specific advice whether this applies to you.

## Medications and dietary supplements

Dietary supplements may contain active ingredients that can affect chemotherapy. It is therefore important that you tell your oncologist which supplements you are using.

## Smoking

Smoking can worsen the side effects of chemotherapy, and reduce the effects of the treatment. We therefore recommend that you quit smoking. It is important that you talk to your doctor or other healthcare professional about your smoking habits, as there are a number of treatment options and

resources that can help you.

## Hygiene

Whilst receiving chemotherapy, good hygiene is important because residues of the medication are excreted through urine, faeces and vomit. This is especially important the first 24-hours after treatment. Here are some general tips:

- After all toilet visits, wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap
- Use paper to wipe up any spills, then wash with soap and water
- Put sanitary pads and diapers in a separate plastic bag before you throw it in your waste bin
- Soiled clothes and linen should be washed immediately
- Flush the toilet twice after use

If you follow the precautions mentioned above, you can safely associate with others, including children and pregnant women.

Throughout the treatment period, it is also important to follow the precautions mentioned above, to avoid infection yourself. In addition, you should avoid close contact with people with infectious diseases.

## Activity, work and emotional reactions

Many people may feel tired and fatigued during treatment. It is common to experience fatigue the first week after chemotherapy. Some people experience reduced memory and attention span. Try to be active every day, but it is important to find a balance between physical activity and rest. Allow yourself to rest more than you normally do. For many people, several short daily walks can work better than a single long walk. Some cancer patients can continue to work, while others cannot work during chemotherapy. Talk to your employer to find how to continue work, or keep in touch with your workplace during sick leave.

Everyone deals with cancer in different ways. Your well-being is important to us, and our staff is ready to talk about your situation. If needed, we have a support staff such as psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and occupational therapists.

## Sexual intimacy during cancer treatment

In general sexual activity is fine during treatment, according to your interest, energy, and comfort level. The residue of chemotherapy in semen and vaginal mucosa are minimal, thus intercourse

after chemotherapy poses little risk to your partner. To be on the safe side, you can use a condom until 4 days after treatment.

Your illness and treatment can lead to challenges in relation to sexual intimacy, relationship and self-image. We have sexual therapists you can talk to, who have extensive experience working with cancer and sexuality. This may be helpful if you feel challenged in relation to intimacy and closeness, have erection problems, lack of desire, or altered self-image. You can meet the therapist alone or with your partner. Ask for a referral from a nurse or doctor.

### **Driving**

It is difficult to know in advance how chemotherapy will affect your ability to drive. You may find the medication makes you sleepy or causes other side effects that make driving difficult. Therefore, it is advisable not to drive after your first treatment. Most people can thereafter drive themselves to and from treatment. Unless your doctor has told you that you cannot drive, it is up to you to decide whether you are able to drive or not.

### **Sunlight and sunbed / tanning bed**

Some medication may make your skin more sensitive to sunlight, and cause various skin reactions such as aggravated sunburn with redness, rash, itching, pimples and swelling. We therefore recommend that you limit tanning the first days after chemotherapy. Always use sunscreen (minimum factor 15) to protect against UVA and UVB rays, and wear protective clothing when you are in strong sunlight. Test the effects of sunlight gradually. After hair loss, your head may be more exposed to sunlight. Contact a doctor in case of skin reactions.

Sunlight has many beneficial effects on health and quality of life, including being our main source of vitamin D. You should therefore enjoy the sun, but avoid getting sunburned.

**If you or your family have any questions, do not hesitate to ask.**

**Before starting treatment, the doctors and nurses will make sure you are well informed.**