

## Receiving Chemotherapy Patient Information

This information sheet provides a brief overview of the more common side effects when you are having chemotherapy. Maintaining your wellness as well as managing side effects are also outlined. Your health care team will discuss management with you as you go through treatment and the need arises. Remember we are always only a phone call away if you have any questions.

Chemotherapy treatment affects people in different ways. Listed below are some of the common side effects:

tiredness	emotional effects
nausea/vomiting	skin problems
reduced blood cell counts	infertility
diarrhoea	taste changes
sore/dry mouth	irregular periods
reduced appetite	hair loss
constipation	pins and needles
sensitivity to the sun	reaction from chemotherapy.

Most of these side effects are temporary. Please discuss your concerns about any of these with your doctor or nurse.

### **Here is some useful information to reduce some of the side effects of chemotherapy**

**Drink plenty of fluid** – This prevents dehydration which can increase side effects. Take regular anti-nausea medication as prescribed. If nauseated, try eating small amounts of food often. If you are nauseated or vomiting and can't keep fluids down for more than a day, please let us know.

**Report any unusual symptoms** – Please let staff know by telephoning as soon as possible if you experience any new symptoms not listed as common side effects, or your symptoms are unrelieved.

**Reaction from chemotherapy** – Very rarely the chemotherapy can cause a delayed reaction in the few hours after you have received treatment. You should contact us immediately if you experience any change in vision, temperature increase, pain in the back, chest or abdomen or skin rash. If you experience any difficulty with breathing (not related to cold or strenuous exercise) or faint an ambulance should be called.

**Lowered immune system / infection** – Chemotherapy may reduce your ability to fight infection. This may increase the risk of developing an infection after chemotherapy. It is important that you check our temperature as advised by your Doctor or Nurse. Please let us know immediately if you develop a temperature above 38°C, have shakes, shivers or chills.

**Body fluids** may contain traces of chemotherapy for 48 hours following treatment. Any body fluids (i.e. vomit) or soiled linen should be handled with a 'no touch' technique or disposable gloves if you have them. Any soiled clothing should be put through a hot wash on its own in the washing machine. You should flush the toilet using a full flush with the lid down.

**Sun protection** – Chemotherapy may increase the risk of sunburn and skin damage by the sun. Avoid exposure to the sun where possible by covering up and wearing high factor skin block at all times.

**Bowels** – Chemotherapy can affect your bowels either making them more loose or constipated. A change in your diet or laxative use might help manage constipation. Please contact us if your bowels have not opened for 2-3 days after using laxatives. Diet may not help with diarrhoea so please call us if your bowel motions

are loose or watery

and / or frequent (more than 4 times your normal number)

and not controlled by Loperamide taken as instructed

or you have ongoing stomach pains

**Bleeding** – Chemotherapy may reduce your platelets; this will increase your risk of bruising and bleeding. If you know your platelets are low, please take extra care with your daily activities, i.e. avoiding contact sports (gentle exercise only), taking care to avoid falls. Do not use a blade razor for shaving, dental floss on your teeth and avoid “blowing” your nose. If you notice any bleeding at all i.e. bowel movements or urine, you should contact us.

**When to phone:**

temperature over 38° (or below 35.5°C)

shivering, shaking and chills

fainting

feeling unwell

increase in bruising and/or paleness

pin point purple-red spots on the skin

if you have severe/persistent diarrhoea

become unexpectantly unwell

spontaneous bleeding

**Contact numbers**

**Haematology patients:** Haematology Outpatients Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm. (03) 364 0384.

After hours and on the weekend: Phone the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit on (03) 364 0660

**Oncology patients:**

Oncology Outpatients Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5pm, (03) 364 0020.

After hours and on the weekend: Phone the Oncology Ward on (03) 364 0020

**Medical Day Unit:**

Monday to Friday 8am – 5pm, (03) 364 1180 or 364 1197

After hours and on the weekend please phone (03) 364 0640 and ask for the registrar on call for your service (e.g. Gastroenterology or Rheumatology).

**The following websites may be of interest in providing you with reliable cancer information about any of the side effects listed above.**

[www.cdhb.govt.nz/cytotoxic](http://www.cdhb.govt.nz/cytotoxic)

[www.cancernz.org.nz](http://www.cancernz.org.nz)

[www.leukaemia.org.nz](http://www.leukaemia.org.nz)

**Notes / Questions**