

# UNDERSTANDING CHEMOTHERAPY BETTER



How It Works



Treating and Preventing  
Side Effects



Getting Support



# UNDERSTANDING **CHEMOTHERAPY** BETTER



## **Discover 6 Things You May Not Know About Chemotherapy**

Cancer treatment has come a long ways since the first use of chemotherapy. **Understanding the benefits and risks** of all your treatment options will help you make an educated decision about your next step.

## Another Weapon in the Fight Against Cancer: KNOWLEDGE

You may have been living with cancer for some time and your cancer may have responded to other therapies.

**However**, if your cancer has spread to other parts of your body, talk to your doctor about the best next step. Chemotherapy may be the right option for you. **Depending on the type of your cancer, chemotherapy may be more effective if done earlier, so don't delay seeing an oncologist.**

For some people, the thought of having chemotherapy is frightening. But **the more you learn about chemotherapy and how it works, the more you may lessen your fears.** It will also help you to better understand why it may be the right option for you.



**For example, today doctors have drugs that were not available before.** These medicines can help treat or prevent nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and other side effects associated with chemotherapy.

**It's important to learn about chemotherapy early** to help you make important decisions later.

**Read on to learn** what everyone should know about it.

**There's also a glossary** of words. If they're used in these pages, we've put them in *italics*.



It's important to learn about chemotherapy early to help you make important decisions about your treatment.

# Discover 6 Things You May Not Know About Chemotherapy

## 1. Chemotherapy may help extend life by slowing cancer growth.

**Chemotherapy works** by attacking cells that divide quickly, like cancer cells.

**In doing so, it may:**

**CONTROL CANCER**—Chemotherapy keeps cancer from spreading, slows cancer's growth, or destroys cancer cells that have spread to other parts of your body.

**STOP CANCER**—Chemotherapy can, in some cases, destroy cancer cells to an extent that your doctor cannot detect them.

**ALLEVIATE CANCER SYMPTOMS**—Chemotherapy shrinks tumors that are causing pain.

**This can be especially important** once your current treatment stops working. Some cancers become resistant to specific treatments over time. This can happen with chemotherapy, too.

Chemotherapy may shrink tumors that are causing pain.



## 2. There are medicines available today to help with certain side effects.

Ask your doctor to see if these medicines are a good option for you.

**Chemotherapy can reduce** the number of white blood cells a person has. This is called *neutropenia*. It may lead to fevers and infection, and may be life-threatening if not addressed in a timely manner.

**Now doctors can prescribe a medicine, G-CSF,** or granulocyte colony-stimulating factor, that helps boost white blood cell counts, and therefore may prevent or lessen the possibility of fevers and infection.

**There are also medicines your doctor** can give you to help prevent or reduce vomiting. They are called *antiemetics*.

**Usually, side effects** get better or go away once chemotherapy is finished.

**Of course, side effects differ by person.** They also vary by chemotherapy treatment, depending on the type of cancer.

Some patients find themselves feeling **fatigued**. However, others are able to maintain their normal lives, including work, exercise and leisure activities.

**If side effects occur, although they may be tough, they must be measured against chemotherapy's possibility to help extend life** and lessen the impact of cancer on your body.

Often patients undergoing treatment are able to work and participate in many of their day-to-day activities.



### 3. When you add an oncologist to the team, it doesn't necessarily mean you won't see your regular doctor as well.

Many individuals with cancer develop a trusted relationship with their doctor. Some of them may worry that the relationship will disappear if they add an oncologist to their healthcare team.

**But don't worry.** Your doctor may wish to stay in close touch with you—and your oncologist—to keep track of your progress.

**Because everyone's cancer is different,** it's important to have a range of doctors on your side—a *multidisciplinary team* that includes an oncologist.

**To get the best care,** people with cancer often need the expertise of several types of doctors, which often times includes an oncologist. Doctors and oncologists work together to develop an optimal treatment plan at every stage of the disease.



## 4. Oncologists are cancer experts.

Your doctor may refer you to an oncologist to help determine the best course of treatment for you, which may include chemotherapy. For some types of cancer, chemotherapy may be more effective if given earlier. So, it may be valuable to talk to an oncologist as soon as possible.



Your oncologist will discuss various treatment options and explain how they fit into your treatment plan. He or she will also help make sure you get the best care possible and help with pain and symptoms management.

There are several kinds of oncologists.

- **Medical oncologist**—often the main healthcare provider for someone who has cancer. He or she may use chemotherapy or other types of treatment. The doctor may also coordinate treatment given by other specialists.
- **Radiation oncologist**—doctor who specializes in using radiation to treat cancer.
- **Surgical oncologist**—a doctor who performs surgical procedures in cancer patients including biopsies.



For some types of cancers, chemotherapy may be more effective if given earlier.

## 5. Chemotherapy can often be administered on an outpatient basis.

**You may receive chemotherapy** in a clinic or at the doctor's office. It's usually not painful when administered, and you'll likely be seated in a comfortable chair. Patients are often encouraged to bring something to read. In some cases, your doctor may want you to stay in the hospital during treatment.

**Sometimes chemotherapy is administered by a pill, an injection, or by IV (intravenous) treatment.** The number of treatments you receive over time will depend on several factors, such as the type of chemotherapy, your age, your health, and what your doctor recommends.



**If you receive chemotherapy** by IV or injection, you will probably return home afterwards, unless your doctor tells you otherwise. Be sure to contact your healthcare provider right away if you feel any side effects, including nausea and vomiting.

**Although everyone's experience will be different,** some patients may experience fatigue. It may be helpful to prepare by planning time to rest on the day of and the day after treatment. You may also want to ask someone to drive you to and from the infusion center.

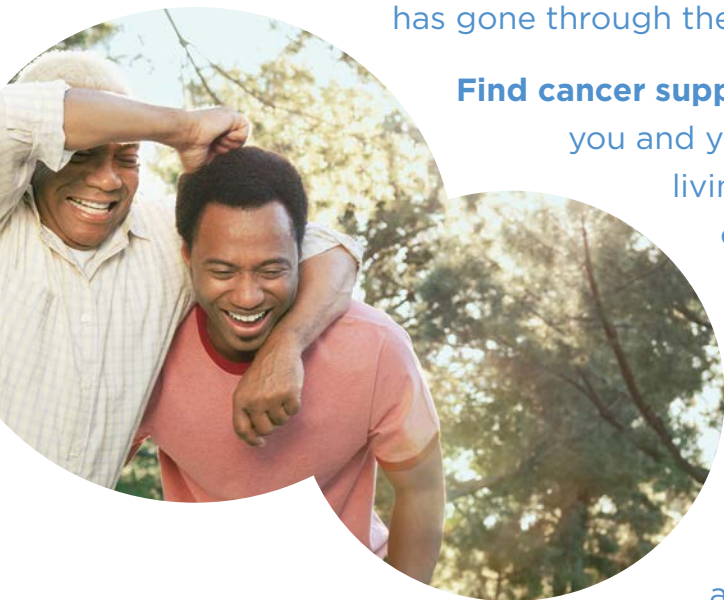
**Make sure to tell your doctor or nurse** about all the over-the-counter and prescription drugs you take, including laxatives, allergy medications, cold medicines, pain relievers, aspirin, ibuprofen, vitamins, dietary supplements, and herbs. Tell them about any other medical conditions that you have, to avoid unwanted drug interactions.

Some patients prepare by planning time to rest on the day of and the day after chemotherapy.



## 6. Support for people undergoing chemotherapy has never been stronger.

**Cancer is a difficult disease**, but you don't have to deal with it by yourself. Family and friends provide vital support, of course, but no one can relate to your situation like someone who has gone through the same things you have.



**Find cancer support networks** that can help you and your loved ones learn more about living with cancer, and connect with others going through a similar experience.

**They are dedicated to provide professional support** on topics such as disease education, treatment options, clinical trials, health and lifestyle tips, as well as financial assistance.

They also allow you to tap into a support group network via phone, online, or even face-to-face, where you can share your questions and find answers.

**Start by exploring some of the many services offered and find what's right for your needs:**

### **American Cancer Society**

Call **1-800-227-2345** or visit **[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)**

### **CancerCare**

Call **1-800-813-4673** or visit **[www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)**

### **Cancer Support Community**

Call **1-888-793-9355** or visit **[www.cancersupportcommunity.org](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org)**



# Two (Three, Four, or Five) Heads Are Better Than One

## Questions and Answers About Multidisciplinary Care

Q. What is a multidisciplinary approach?

**A multidisciplinary approach is a team approach.** Several types of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals like social workers, office staff, and insurance administrators are all working toward the same goal: your health.


Q. What specialties are on a multidisciplinary team?

**They can include your primary physician,** your surgeon, medical and radiation oncologists, and the highly skilled nurses who support them.

Q. Can multidisciplinary care improve my treatment?

**To get the best care,** people with cancer often need the expertise of several types of doctors. Doctors and oncologists can work together to develop an optimal treatment plan at every stage of the disease and its treatment.

**Don't delay** meeting with an oncologist. Together with your doctor, he or she can let you know the different treatment options that make sense for you.

  
Consider getting a second opinion. It may provide new insights on a treatment you are considering.



## GLOSSARY

To help you better understand cancer and have a productive conversation with your healthcare team, here are some definitions of words you might come across—words we've put in *italics* in this booklet.

**Antiemetics**—medicines that help prevent or reduce nausea and vomiting.

**Chemotherapy**—the use of drugs to kill cancer cells to shrink tumors and help extend life.

**CT scan**—helps show whether cancer has spread from the original site of the cancer.

**G-CSF (granulocyte colony-stimulating factor)**—during chemotherapy, the number of white blood cells can go down, which sometimes leads to infection and fever. G-CSF is a medication that helps increase white blood cells.

**Locally advanced cancer**—cancer that has spread from where it started to nearby lymph nodes or tissue.

**Metastasis**—a process in which cancer spreads from the original site to other parts of the body. **Bone metastasis** occur when cancer cells have spread to the bone.

**Multidisciplinary care**—a full team of healthcare professionals working toward the same goal—for example, a primary physician, surgeon, radiation oncologist, medical oncologist, nurses, social workers, office staff, and insurance administrators.

**Neutropenia**—a possible side effect of chemotherapy in which the number of white blood cells become reduced. This can lead to fevers and infection.

**Oncologist**—a doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating cancer.





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## Did you know?

Cancer treatment has come a long ways since the first use of chemotherapy. **Understanding the benefits and risks** of all your treatment options will help you make an educated decision about your next step.

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