

CHEMOTHERAPY AND PROSTATE CANCER

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CHEMOTHERAPY AND PROSTATE CANCER

(The following information is based on the general experiences of many prostate cancer patients. Your experience may be different.)

You and your doctor are talking about chemotherapy (key-mo-ther-a-pee) as a way to treat your prostate cancer. To help you get ready for chemotherapy, it is important for you to learn as much about the treatment as possible. It is also important to learn how to manage the side effects you may have from chemotherapy.

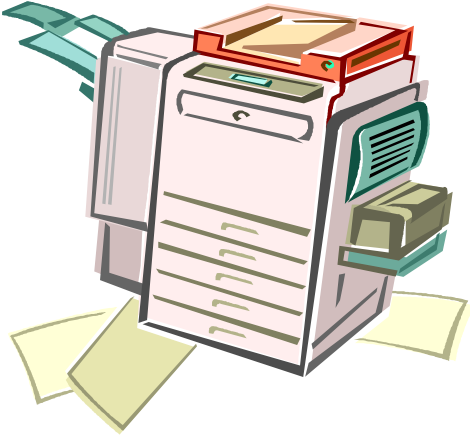
What is Chemotherapy?

When you have chemotherapy, you are given powerful anticancer medicines that kill many of your prostate cancer cells. Chemotherapy treats your whole body, not just one area, like surgery or radiation therapy. The chemotherapy medicines you are given travel throughout your whole body. This lets the anticancer medicines kill cancer cells that travel in your blood stream and your lymph system (See IMAPCT brochure, “When Prostate Cancer Returns,” for more information.) This is especially helpful when prostate cancer has metastasized which means it has spread to other parts of your body.

Why Would I Need Chemotherapy?

Prostate cancer can recur or come back after several months, a few years, or many years. It can recur or come back even after you may have received another kind of treatment or treatments for prostate cancer. When prostate cancer comes back, it is called recurrence (See IMPACT brochure, “When Prostate Cancer Returns,” for more information). When prostate cancer comes back while you are on hormone therapy, chemotherapy becomes an option to help manage your prostate cancer.

How Does Chemotherapy Work?



Healthy cells in your body divide and grow. Each cell divides in half to make another cell just like itself. Cancer cells do not divide and grow, as they should. Instead of making just one cell like itself, the cancer cell makes many copies of itself. After a while, the body becomes overworked because of all the cancer cells. Chemotherapy medicine keeps cancer cells from copying themselves. By killing the cancer cells, chemotherapy medicine tries to keep the cancer from moving to other parts of your body as well. Chemotherapy may also be used to shrink lymph nodes that have cancer in them.

Will Chemotherapy Cure My Prostate Cancer?

No, chemotherapy will not cure prostate cancer, because it does not kill all of the prostate cancer cells. Chemotherapy helps control your prostate cancer. It 1) may slow the growth of your prostate cancer; 2) may lower the amount of pain you have; and 3) may shrink your prostate cancer.

How is Chemotherapy Given?

You can get chemotherapy in two different ways. Some of the anticancer medicines are given to you intravenously which is also known as an IV.

This means that the medicines go into your body through a needle in your vein. Other chemotherapy medicines can be taken by mouth or orally.

Sometimes two or more chemotherapy medicines will be given to you at the same time. This treatment may work better at killing your cancer cells.

You may need many blood tests before, during, and after getting chemotherapy. These blood tests show how your body is doing. When you have a blood test, a nurse will take a small amount of blood from your arm with a needle. The tests can tell your doctor how much chemotherapy medicine you need. Blood tests may also tell the doctor how well the chemotherapy is controlling your cancer.

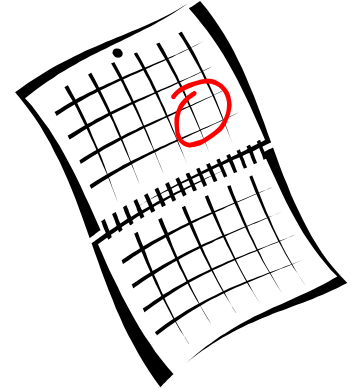
Getting Chemotherapy Through An IV

If you are getting chemotherapy medicines that are given through an IV, you will go to a clinic on the day you are scheduled to have your chemotherapy. If your blood test shows that you can get your chemotherapy, a chemotherapy nurse will start you on an IV by carefully placing a needle into one of the veins in your arm. This needle will be connected to two bags of liquid by a small tube. One bag contains the chemotherapy medicine. The second bag contains a fluid that will be used: 1) to wash all the chemotherapy medicine out of the tubing and into your body and 2) to make sure that you have fluid going into your vein until the nurse removes the needle. The chemotherapy nurse will give the medicine to you slowly through the IV. Everything will probably go well during your treatment. If you have a problem during your treatment, there will be a nurse nearby who will check on you while you receive your chemotherapy. Do not be afraid to tell the nurse if you do not feel good or if your arm starts to hurt at the place where the needle goes into your vein.

Getting Chemotherapy By Mouth or Orally

If you are taking chemotherapy pills, make sure that you take them exactly as you are told. It is important that you do not skip a time when you are supposed to take a pill.

Also, do not stop taking your medicine unless you speak with your doctor. It may help you to keep track of when you need to take your medicine by using a



calendar with the dates marked to show when you need to take it.

Some men find it helpful to use a pill box that has spaces in it with different times of the day. You can fill the pillbox with your chemotherapy medicine so that you are reminded to take it at the right time. It is also important for you to let your doctor know about any medication, even medicine you buy without a prescription that you are taking along with your chemotherapy medicine. Call your doctor or nurse case manager if you have any questions about the medicine you are taking.

Are There Side Effects With Chemotherapy?

Yes, there can be side effects or unwanted changes in your body when you have chemotherapy. Side effects are different from person to person, and may be different from one treatment to the next. Some people have no or very mild side effects. The good news is that there are ways to deal with most of the side effects.

The strong anticancer medicines used in chemotherapy kill healthy cells along with the cancer cells. This is why you may have side effects with chemotherapy. Along with the cancer cells, chemotherapy also kills healthy cells that grow and divide very quickly. Some kinds of these cells include: cells that make your hair grow, cells that make new blood cells, and cells that cover the inside of your mouth, stomach, and intestines. Most of the side effects slowly go away after the chemotherapy stops. There are ways to make the side effects easier to deal with while you are having chemotherapy.

How Will I Feel During My Chemotherapy?

The fact that you need to have chemotherapy, and the effect it has on your life, can cause you to have many different feelings. Fear, worry and sadness are common to many people with cancer.

Some people find it helps to learn about their disease and treatment because it makes them less afraid of their treatment. Find out as much as you want to know. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Your emotional well-being is as important as your physical health.

Loss of concentration may be a side effect of chemotherapy. This can affect your ability to listen and remember things, which are explained at your treatment visits. Sometimes people find reading during chemotherapy treatment hard to do. Don't feel embarrassed to ask for information to be repeated as often as you need it.

Talking with an understanding friend, relative, minister or another patient may be helpful. Your nurse case manager can provide you with a list of

local prostate cancer support groups. There will be men in the support group who have had chemotherapy.

Many people don't understand about cancer or its treatment and may avoid you because they're not sure what to say or how to help. Try to be open in talking with others about your illness, treatment, needs and feelings. People will often be willing to lend their support. If you get tired easily, limit your activities and do only the things that mean the most to you.

If you are doing or want to find out about other treatments in addition to what your doctor tells you to do, it is ok. You might like to try new methods to help you deal with treatment and its side effects, such as meditation or relaxation exercises. Make sure that you tell your doctor about other treatments, vitamins or herbal medications you are taking or doing.

Remember to tell your doctor or nurse case manager about anything that feels different in your body. Ask questions. The side effects will stop when the chemotherapy stops. Take good care of yourself.

Remember everyone needs some support during difficult times. You shouldn't hesitate to ask for help from your doctor or nurse case manager, during or after your treatment.

Key Words

Chemotherapy: a prostate cancer treatment, which treats your whole body with powerful anticancer medicines to kill many of your prostate cancer cells.

Cycle: set time periods.

IV (intravenously): medications that are given to you through a needle in your vein.

Orally: taken by mouth.

Recur: to come back.

Side Effect: unwanted changes in your body caused by your prostate cancer treatment.