



Chemotherapy, also called chemo, uses medicines to treat cancer.

What is chemotherapy?

- Chemotherapy works in your whole body, by travelling through your blood to kill the cancer.
- There are many different chemo medicines to treat the many different cancers.

Why do I need it?

Because your body cannot fix cancer by itself, doctors use chemo medicines to poison the cancer.

These medicines may help to:

- cure the cancer
- stop the cancer from getting bigger or spreading
- shrink the size of the cancer
- reduce any pain and other problems caused by the cancer.

How do I get chemo?

You can have chemo in a variety of ways.

The most common method is using a needle that puts the medicine straight into your blood. This is done once a day for 5 days. After this you are given 1- 4 weeks rest, then the cycle starts again. The doctor will tell you how many cycles and how much rest you need.

Other ways include swallowing tablets or drinking liquid medicine. You may need to take this once or twice a day for a set time.

Where do I go to get chemo?

This will depend on the type of cancer you have. It may be in a hospital or at home.

How long will I have chemo?

Your doctor (called a medical oncologist) will tell you how long you will have chemotherapy. This will depend on:

- the type of cancer you have
- the type of medicine given to you by your doctor
- how you feel when you are getting chemotherapy

How will the chemo affect my body?

Chemotherapy medicines are really strong so they can kill the cancer in your body. Sometimes these medicines can affect how you look and feel.

Your doctor will tell you what to expect but some people:

- feel a little to very tired
- have nausea and may want to vomit (spew)
- have a sore mouth or throat
- may find their body hair may fall out
- may have some pain/numbness or tingling
- have an increased risk of getting infections

Women may find their menstruation periods change.

Many of these can be treated and often they go away after treatment ends.

Your chemotherapy team will help you through the treatment and with any problems you may have.

This information has been adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by Menzies School of Health Research in consultation with a Clinical Advisory Group and an Indigenous Consultation Group. Production by Cancer Council.