

# Home care instructions for patients receiving chemotherapy

The side effects of chemotherapy vary according to the medications given and on the individual patient. Usually the side effects are the most pronounced 2-7 days after the treatment.

## Blood values and risk of infection

Chemotherapy will affect your blood values and you are at increased risk of developing a serious infection that your body will not be able to treat itself. If you get a temperature of 38.0 °C or above at home, go immediately to the Central Finland Hospital Nova emergency department. If you have received a patient card, bring it with you and show it at the emergency department. Bring a list of your medicines, your personal spray medicines (e.g. asthma spray) and insulin pens with you. Prepare to stay at the hospital.

## Nausea

If you experience nausea, take the anti-nausea medication prescribed for you (e.g. Primpera, Granisetron, Ondansetron) as instructed. Ensure adequate intake of fluids (2-3 litres) and nutrition. Frequent meal intervals and cool, neutral foods and drinks can alleviate nausea. If you are unable to drink or eat enough, contact your healthcare institution.

## Bowel movements

If you start having diarrhoea several times a day, contact your healthcare institution. If you are taking laxatives and you start having diarrhoea, stop taking the laxatives and see if the diarrhoea calms down. Remember to drink plenty of fluids. If your temperature rises in conjunction with having diarrhoea, go to the emergency department.

Chemotherapy, painkillers, and antiemetic medicines may cause constipation. Regular gastrointestinal activity is important during treatment. If necessary, take sufficient amounts of laxative medication. You can buy laxatives at pharmacies without a prescription (e.g. Pegorion, Lactulos and Laxoberon). Constipation is also relieved by exercise, sufficient drinking and fibre-rich food (e.g. vegetables, fruit, in particular plums and wholegrain products).

## Skin and mucous membrane symptoms

Ensure thorough but gentle care of the mouth, skin and mucous membranes. The skin and mucous membranes can be treated with emollient creams and oils. Preparations for moisturising and caring for the mouth are available in pharmacies. If your mouth becomes so sore you have trouble drinking/eating sufficiently, contact your healthcare institution. The mucous membranes of the genitalia may be drier than usual during the treatment. Products to combat this, e.g. Repadina, Cerdal, are available in pharmacies.

## Sexuality

Chemotherapy can cause hormonal dysfunction and changes in sexual life. Menstruation may become less frequent and go away, and menopause symptoms may emerge (sweating, insomnia

and dry mucous membranes). Lack of sex drive, irritation of the mucous membranes and erectile dysfunction are possible. Discuss the matter openly with your partner.

Take care of protection during and after cancer treatments as instructed by your doctor. Condom use is recommended on the day of chemotherapy and approximately for one week thereafter due to the risk of infection and protection from secretions.

During intercourse, you may benefit from lubricating creams available from the pharmacy.

### Handling secretions

Chemotherapy drugs are excreted in urine, faeces, sweat, saliva, vomit and semen for up to 7 days after treatment. Avoid direct skin contact with secretions. After using the toilet, flush the toilet twice with the toilet lid closed.

### Between treatments

- Depending on your condition, you can lead as normal a life as possible. However, avoid large public events and contact with people with contagious diseases. Remember to take care of good hand hygiene.
- A usual side effect of chemotherapy is fatigue and exhaustion. Physical exercise is one of the best ways to alleviate fatigue. Although the body's tolerance of exertion is usually reduced as a result of the treatments, it is recommended that you try to go outdoors and/or exercise daily according to your energy levels.
- The use of alcohol and herbal treatment products should be avoided. Vitamin D and multivitamin preparations from the pharmacy are authorised if necessary.
- If at all possible, stop smoking. Smoking impairs the effectiveness of chemotherapy and slows your recovery.
- Conversing with your loved ones and/or a professional and peer support often helps you cope better.

### Contact with the treatment unit

Contact the nursing staff immediately if you have any complicated side effects caused by the treatment or other symptoms associated with the illness

- a temperature of 37.5 degrees Celsius or above (38.0 degrees Celsius or above always go to the emergency department)
- lowered general fitness level
- severe tiredness
- severe diarrhoea
- bleeding
- difficult skin symptoms
- pain, chest pain

- shortness of breath
- or some other difficult symptom

Contact the treatment unit if you have been hospitalized or you are receiving an antibiotic treatment prescribed by a unit other than the Cancer or Haematology unit of Hospital Nova. Please also contact us if you have any upcoming dental procedures.

**If necessary, seek urgent care directly at the Hospital Nova emergency department.**

- Treatment Centre tel. 014 269 1034 (Mon-Fri 8 am to 2 pm.)
- Hospital beds for oncology and haematological diseases, tel. 014 269 3716 (24/7)
- Haematology Polyclinic tel. 014 269 2950 (Mon-Fri 9 am to 2 pm)