



PREPARING FOR CHEMOTHERAPY

Your doctor has told you that you need chemotherapy. You may be wondering what it will be like and how you can prepare for what lies ahead. The following are suggestions that may be helpful in preparing for chemotherapy:

Questions to ask:

When you meet with your doctor or health care provider, gathering the following information will help you when questions arise.

1. What chemotherapy medications will I be taking?

2. What side effects can I expect?

3. Will I be medicated for side effects? _____

4. Will I loose my hair? _____

5. Will I be given prescriptions to get filled? _____

6. How long will I be at the clinic for treatment? _____

7. Should I eat before I come for treatment? _____

8. Should I take my regular medications (if applicable)? _____

9. Are there any medications I should avoid (such as Tylenol, aspirin, or ibuprophen)?

10. Who should I call if I have a problem? _____

Daytime number? _____

Nighttime/weekend number? _____

Things you can do to prepare:

- **Go to the dentist.** This is especially true if you know you need dental work. Chemotherapy can cause you to be at risk for infection and dental work should not be done during this time. Also, your dentist may be able to offer suggestions to manage chemotherapy induced mouth problems.
- **Get a PAP smear.** If you are female and preparing for chemotherapy, it may be wise to get your annual PAP smear before chemotherapy begins; to avoid false abnormal results. Sometimes chemotherapy can affect the cells on the cervix for 6 months to a year after chemotherapy.
- **Get a wig if you will need one.** If you are likely to lose your hair. Plan to purchase your wig before you are likely to lose it – it can be easier before you start therapy. A stylist will have a much easier time matching your hair to a wig if you have your hair when you shop. Some insurance companies will pay for a wig. In this case you will need a prescription from your doctor or health care provider for a “cranial prosthesis.” Your cancer care center may have lists of recommended wig retailers. Ask your health care provider or the nurse.
- **Arrange for transportation.** Many chemotherapy regimens are accompanied by pre-medications that could make you feel sleepy. Also, since everyone reacts to chemotherapy differently, you will not know how you might feel. It’s best, at least for the first treatment, to have a ride that can bring you and take you home. Many times it’s nice to have a support person with you during treatment as well.
- **Wear comfortable clothing.** If you will be getting chemotherapy, it is best to wear comfortable clothing. If you will be receiving your chemotherapy through a vein in your arm, make sure your sleeves will allow good access past your elbow.
- **Talk with your boss at work.** Depending on your work situation, it may be wise to discuss your situation with your boss. Ask if there is any flexibility in scheduling. If you are likely not to be able to work, consider speaking with human resources about **The Family Medical Leave Act**. Don’t just quit your job, you may need the insurance benefits. Discuss this with a social worker, first. A social worker is often able to help you navigate through these situations.
- **Arrange child care.** You may need to arrange for child care both during treatment and afterwards. In most cases, you will be unable to watch young children while you are receiving your chemotherapy. Once you are at home, you may or may not feel up to the challenge.

Other considerations:

- **Prepare meals ahead.** If you are the person responsible for meals, consider making some meals before you begin chemotherapy and freeze them in containers that offer the correct portions. Be mindful of dishes that may be spicy or difficult to tolerate if you are not feeling up to par. Plan some “easy” menus so that you don’t have to use a lot of energy on meal preparation.
- **Consider help at home.** Many times, your friends and family members want to know what they can do to help. Give them a job – it will help both of you. Some ideas include:
 - Helping with meals
 - Helping with child care
 - Helping with house cleaning
 - Helping with transportation
 - Running errands
 - Keeping you company