



Gynecologic Disease Center

At Walter Reed Army Medical Center

Common Questions

Are there any medications I should not take while on chemotherapy?

Do not take any medicine that has not been prescribed by your physician. Do not use Aspirin or any products containing aspirin such as Bufferin, Anacin, Stanback, cold capsules, etc., unless advised by your physician. If your pain is mild, use acetaminophen (such as Tylenol), which can be purchased at any drug-store without a prescription. Let your physician know if your pain worsens.

Can I drink alcohol while taking chemotherapy?

Ask your physician or nurse.

Should I avoid people with colds and flu?

Avoid contact with people with an infection or virus such as cold or flu. Take special care to avoid people with active chicken pox since this can develop into a serious infection in chemotherapy patients. Avoid caring for children on the day they receive vaccinations.

How long will I receive chemotherapy?

Each case is different. Chemotherapy is given until the full effect on the cancer is seen. Chemotherapy treatments may last for several weeks, several months or several years.

Should I do anything differently while taking chemotherapy? Will I need more rest or a special diet?

The best thing you can do is to use common sense. When you become tired, you should rest. Many patients on chemotherapy continue their usual jobs without problems. Try to maintain an ideal body weight and eat foods you like. Your nurse or physician will tell you if you need to follow a special diet.

Should I take shots or vitamins?

If you are eating regular meals, you may not need vitamins. It is okay to take most vitamins- check with your nurse/physician first. You should ask your nurse or physician for their advice.

Should I avoid sexual activity while on chemotherapy?

Unless instructed by your physician, there is no medical reason to avoid sexual intercourse while you are receiving chemotherapy. When your white blood cell count is low, it is important to use a lubricant to prevent any skin tears.

Can I have my teeth fixed while taking chemotherapy?

Before any major dental work, your dentist should speak with your nurse or physician. Try to avoid any dental work while your white blood cell count is low from a previous chemotherapy treatment. When your white blood cell count is normal, it is OK to have dental work.



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Do some people receive combinations of surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy and immunotherapy?

The type of treatment you receive will depend on your situation. Your physician will consider the most advanced, up-to-date therapy for your diagnosis. If surgery, radiation, chemotherapy or biotherapy is necessary, your physician will review those treatments with you and answer any questions you may have.

Can I take a shower or bath while I am taking chemotherapy?

It is very important to shower every day while undergoing treatment. Use antibacterial soaps and use lotion if your skin is dry. Our skin is our first defense against infection and illness.

How do I know if the treatments are working? Do you do tests to monitor the progress?

In most cases you will not know how well the treatments are working until some time after you are finished with your treatments. Sometimes it is possible to see on an X-ray or a CAT scan if the tumor is shrinking. If you are having pain or other symptoms from your cancer, you may notice a decrease in pain or symptoms after you have received some treatments. Your doctor will tell you what to expect in your specific case.

Pain

When should I take my pain medicine?

Take your pain medicine when the pain starts. You should not wait until the pain becomes severe to take your medicine. Pain is easier to control before it becomes severe. Take your pain medicine regularly and as your physician or nurse tells you. Hot or cold packs may be helpful with your pain medicines to control your pain (if you are receiving radiation, please discuss with your physician first).

Will I become addicted to pain medicine?

Studies show that cancer patients rarely get hooked or addicted to pain medicine. Many studies have shown that cancer patients can stop pain medicines easily when their health improves. Remember, it is important to take pain medicine regularly to control pain.

Will the medicine stop working if I take too much?

The medicine will not stop working. However, your body may become used to the medication. This is called tolerance. Tolerance is not usually a problem with cancer pain treatment because the amount of medicine can be increased or other medicines can be added to make the pain medicine work better.

Am I a bad patient if I complain?

No. Controlling your pain is an important part of your care. Tell your physician or nurse if you have pain, if your pain gets worse, or if you are taking pain medicine and it is not working. They can help you feel better.



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How can I obtain refills for my pain medicine?

Please remember to plan ahead when you need to have prescriptions refilled. Call your nurse (Melissa or Sarah) during working hours two or three days before your medication runs out. This is particularly important if you are taking strong pain medications. *Always check Friday morning to make sure you will have enough pain medication to get you through the weekend.* Some medications can only be obtained at Walter Reed as not all pharmacies carry all medications.

Wigs

How many wigs will I need?

You may want to obtain two wigs if you wear one for long periods every day.

Will I get hot wearing my wig?

A good quality wig is constructed to allow for adequate air circulation.

Will my wig come off while I wear it?

Properly fitted wigs rarely come off during normal wear.

Will the wind blow it off?

Normal breezes will not remove a properly fitted wig. If it is extremely windy, a scarf will give added security.

Will my wig be ruined if I get caught in the rain?

A few sprinkles will not harm a wig. If you should get really wet, gently remove the wig as soon as possible. Drape it over a canister or wig stand and let it dry completely. Never attempt to brush a wet wig. Carrying a pocket-size rain cap will help prevent this.

How often should I wash my wig?

You should wash your wig about every two weeks if you wear it every day for long periods. Keep your remaining hair and scalp clean to prevent the transfer of scalp oils and perspiration to your wig. Between wearings, drape your wig over a canister or wig stand to allow it to air dry.

Will my insurance company pay for my wig?

Tricare may pay for your wig, but you will need to check to see if you need to pay up front and get reimbursement, or if the wig shop will provide the wig and bill Tricare. Medicare does not pay for a wig. Your nurse will assist you by placing the request in the computer and providing you with a listing of Tricare approved wig shops in your area. The American Cancer Society will provide wigs at no cost to you through their "Look-Good-Feel-Better" program. Check with your local ACS office for program offerings.



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Should I sleep in my wig?

You would probably not be comfortable sleeping in your wig. If you want your head covered, a turban or soft cap is a better choice.

Should I wear my wig if I am in the hospital?

Most patients prefer to wear turbans or caps since they can be slept in, are comfortable and require no styling. Many patients bring their wigs for visitors. A colorful scarf is also an easy, comfortable choice.

How do I style a wig to look natural?

If you brush and style your hair to suit yourself, you can fix a wig. Today's wigs maintain their styles with little effort. The stylist at the shop where you purchase your wig can assist you in the care and styling of your wig. They can also trim and style the wig to suit your preferences.



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