

In this handout, you will learn about the different types of cancer treatments and some expected side effects. It is important for you to know the different forms of treatment available to you. Your cancer treatment is a team approach, and we are here to help you through your journey. Feel free to ask your doctor, nurse or technician any questions you may have. We look forward to taking care of you.

Different Types of Treatment

- **Chemotherapy uses medications to treat cancer.** Chemotherapy medications can be given to you in different ways. The four most common ways to give chemotherapy are by:
 - vein (intravenously)
 - mouth (orally)
 - injection into muscle (intramuscular)
 - injection into the central nervous system (intrathecal)

- **Radiation uses radiation beams to kill cancer cells.** Radiation is able to treat certain areas that sometimes cannot be reached with chemotherapy. Radiation can be given externally or internally and at different intensities, depending on your diagnosis.

- **Immunotherapy (biologic therapy or biotherapy) uses the immune system to fight disease, including cancer.** This can be done in different ways: for example, stimulating your own immune system to work harder or smarter, or giving your immune system components, such as man-made immune system proteins.

Note: If your cancer treatment is not mentioned in this handout, ask your nurse or technician for individualized information.

Your cancer treatment will depend on the type of cancer you have and it's stage of development. Cancer treatment may:

- Cure your cancer.
- Keep cancer from spreading.
- Slow cancer growth.
- Destroy cancer cells that may have spread (metastasized) to other parts of the body from the original tumor site.
- Relieve the symptoms caused by cancer.

Cancer treatment may be given in different combinations. Generally, treating cancer with a combination of medications and/or radiation is more powerful than using only one type of treatment. Treatment combination can destroy more cancer cells and lower the chance of resistance to the medications used to treat cancer.

Your doctor should discuss with you which treatment regimen will work best. Ask your doctor for details about your cancer treatment. To lower the chance of having reactions to treatment, tell your doctor about all other medications you are taking, including herbal supplements, alternative treatments, and/or vitamins.

What is the Goal of Treatment?

Before you begin your treatment, your doctor should speak with you about the goal of your treatment. Understanding the expected benefits, risks, alternatives, and side effects can help you make informed decisions about your care. Ask your doctor any questions you have about your treatment plan.

Will I Experience Any Side Effects?

Side effects are different for every person. Most side effects go away after treatment is completed. The staff works closely with you to minimize any side effects. Speak to your doctor and nurse about side effects that may occur with your treatment.

Important Side Effects to Watch For

- Infection:** When you are in the hospital, we monitor you closely for signs of infection, such as low white blood cells and fever. When you return home, check your temperature twice a day. Call your doctor if you have a temperature above 100.5°F / 38°C, or shaking chills.
- Bleeding:** When you are in the hospital, we monitor your platelet levels and watch for bleeding. If you notice any unusual bruising or bleeding from any part of your body, report it to your nurse or doctor immediately.
- Fatigue, bodily discomfort:** Plan rest periods between activities.
- Diarrhea, constipation:** When you are in the hospital, the nurse should ask you about your bowel movements daily. Tell your nurse if you have diarrhea or constipation. Keeping a log of your bowel movements at home may make it easier to report problems to your doctor.

- ❑ **Mouth sores:** Brush, floss and rinse your mouth 4 times a day in the hospital and at home. Avoid rinses with alcohol; we recommend salt and soda rinses instead. Report any mouth discomforts to your nurse or doctor immediately.
- ❑ **Nausea, vomiting:** You will be started on anti-nausea medication in the hospital and should go home with a prescription. Tell your nurse or doctor immediately if the medication is not controlling your nausea.
- ❑ **Skin changes and sensitivities:** Avoid direct sunlight. Protect your skin from the sun with clothing and broad-brimmed hats. If you are receiving radiation, ask your doctor before you use any soaps, lotions or sun block. It may take your skin up to a year to recover after treatment.
- ❑ **Hair changes (thinning or loss):** Hair changes will occur with some cancer treatments. Your nurse and doctor can provide you with resources for wigs and hats.
- ❑ **Change in appetite or taste:** Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day. Take your anti-nausea medications as ordered by your doctor. Drink lots of fluids.
- ❑ **Sexual function and fertility:** Chemotherapy can, but does not, always affect sexual organs and functioning. The possible side effects depend on the drugs used, age, and general health. For more information speak with your doctor.
- ❑ **Other:** _____

Where Will I Receive Treatment?

Where you receive your treatment depends on many factors, such as your type of cancer, the type of treatment, the dosage, and your doctor's recommendations. There are two main settings for treatment:

- Outpatient – most patients come and go from their home to either their doctor's office or to the hospital for treatment.
- Inpatient – some patients receive treatment while they are staying in the hospital. They receive specific instructions from their doctor or nurse about where to go for treatment.

More Ways to Learn

Cancer Organizations

- Contact the **American Cancer Society** at (800) 227-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.
- Contact the **Cancer Information Service** through the National Cancer Institute at (800) 4-CANCER or (800) 422-6237.

California Pacific Medical Center Resources

- Go to www.cpmc.org/learning or www.cpmc.org/services/cancer.
- Our **Cancer Care Navigation Services** offers supportive guidance for cancer patients. For more information, call (866) 975-COPE.
- The **Community Health Resource Center** offers a variety of services for patients with cancer. For more information, call (415) 923-3155.
- The **Women's Health Resource Center** offers supportive care services including a boutique of temporary hair loss products (for example, wigs are available for women with cancer). For more information, call (415) 600-0500.
- The **Institute for Health & Healing** offers in-patient massage therapy and other supportive services. For more information, call (415) 600-4325.

Notes & Questions to Ask my Doctor

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Note: This information is not meant to replace any information or personal medical advice which you get directly from your doctor(s). If you have any questions about this information, such as the risks or benefits of the treatment listed, please ask your doctor(s).