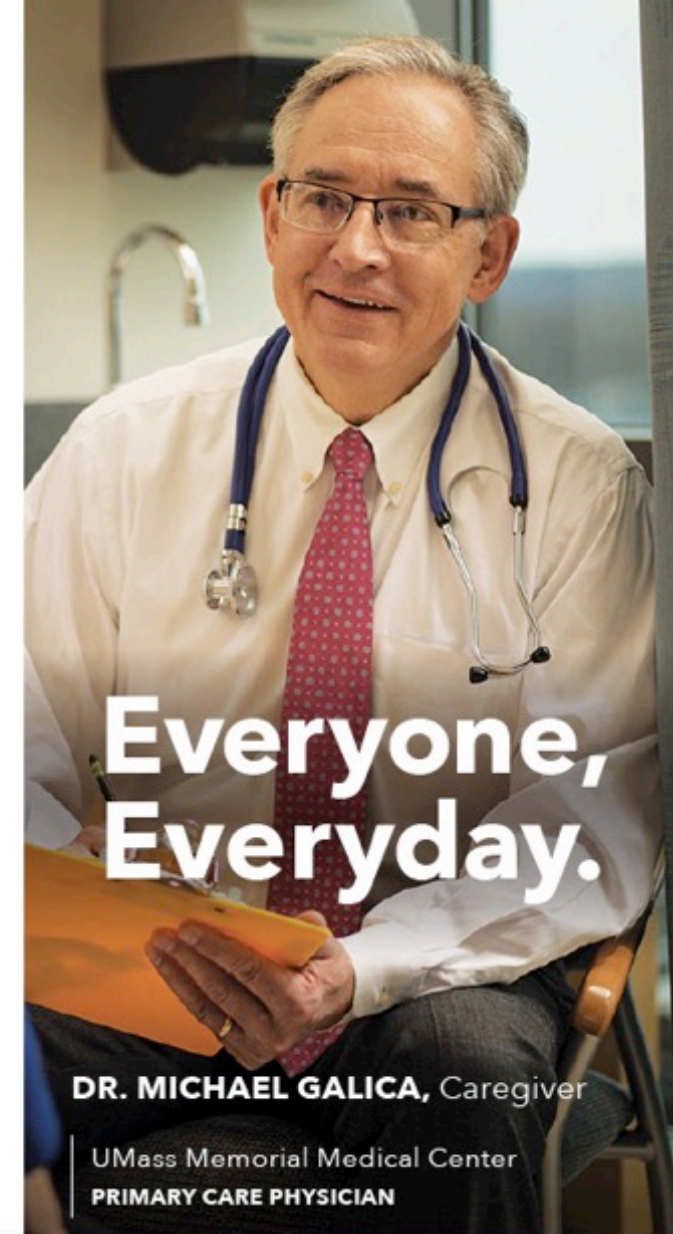


CHEMOTHERAPY

What should I expect?



UMass Memorial - Community Healthlink
UMass Memorial HealthAlliance-Clinton Hospital
UMass Memorial - Marlborough Hospital
UMass Memorial Medical Center
UMass Memorial Medical Group
UMass Memorial Accountable Care Organization, Inc.



WHAT IS CHEMOTHERAPY?

Chemotherapy is treatment that uses drugs to stop the growth of cancer cells, either by killing the cells or by stopping them from dividing.

Chemotherapy may be given by mouth, injection, infusion, or on the skin, depending on the type and stage of the cancer being treated.

It may be given alone or with other treatments, such as surgery, radiation therapy, or biologic therapy. ("NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms")



HOW DOES CHEMOTHERAPY WORK?

Chemotherapy works by stopping or slowing the growth of cancer cells, which grow and divide quickly. Chemotherapy is used to:

Treat cancer

Chemotherapy can be used to cure cancer, lessen the chance it will return, or stop or slow its growth.

Ease cancer symptoms

Chemotherapy can be used to shrink tumors that are causing pain and other problems.
("NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms")



DOES EVERYONE GET THE SAME CHEMO?

No, everyone does not get the same chemotherapy.

Your chemotherapy treatment plan is decided by the type of cancer you have, whether or not you have been treated before, or if you have other health concerns and markers your tumor may express.

There are many chemotherapy drugs and they all work a little different. Some people may only receive one drug and others may receive several.

The schedule on when you receive your chemotherapy and how often you receive your chemotherapy also depends on your diagnosis.



SIDE EFFECTS AND HOW TO MANAGE THEM

There are many possible side effects of chemotherapy. This is not to say that you will experience all or some of them.

The following slides will address the most common side effects.

It is important as you go through treatment to tell your doctor or nurse what symptoms you are experiencing.

Many side effects are easily managed, but the staff cannot help you if you do not tell them.



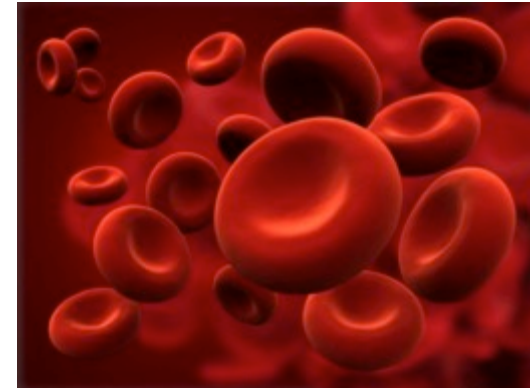
ANEMIA

Anemia is a result of too few red blood cells to carry oxygen through your body. As chemo kills the cancer cells it unfortunately kills some of our good cells too. Anemia can cause:

—Weakness, shortness of breath, feeling dizzy, faint or very tired.

To manage the side effects of Anemia:

- Get plenty of rest (8 hours per night)
- Limit your activities when possible
- Accept help from your family and friends
- Eat a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids
- Stand up slowly to minimize dizziness



APPETITE/TASTE CHANGES

Appetite changes can be caused by nausea, vomiting, mouth or throat problem. Drugs may alter the taste of food or cause fatigue.

Eating and good nutrition help to increase your energy and help you to heal.

Some ways to manage appetite changes are:

- Eat 5 to 6 small meals per day--this helps with nausea

- Eat on a schedule rather than when you feel hungry

- Drink milkshakes and other liquids that can provide you with protein, vitamins and calories

- Use plastic utensils to help with the metallic taste some chemo causes



BOWEL CHANGES

Constipation can be caused by many chemotherapy drugs as well as pain medications.

Drink at least 8 cups of water or non caffeinated/non alcoholic fluids per day

Be active; go for a walk or do yoga

Eat a diet high in fiber

Let your doctor or nurse know if you have not had a bowel movement in 2 days so they can suggest a treatment for you.



BOWEL CHANGES

Diarrhea can also be caused by some chemotherapies

Eat 5 or 6 small meals per day

Eat low fiber foods

Drink 9 to 12 cups of clear liquids per day

- Avoid alcohol, milk, spicy foods, greasy food, caffeine or foods that can cause a lot of gas

Make sure your doctor or nurse know if you are having diarrhea. If it lasts more than 24 hours, you may become dehydrated. Take your antidiarrheal medications as your provider tells you. If it is not helping, know who to call.



FATIGUE

Fatigue can be from mild to extreme

Causes of fatigue:

Anemia, pain, medications, appetite changes, sleeping patterns, lack of activity, trouble breathing, infection, trying to do too much or underlying medical problems

Managing fatigue

Relax! Try meditation, yoga, prayer, guided imagery, massage...

Eat and drink well!

Plan time to rest

Exercise when you have the most energy

Talk to your doctor or nurse for more ideas on how to help your fatigue



HAIR LOSS

You can lose your hair on your head, face, arms, underarms, legs and pubic area

Not all treatment will cause hair loss. Talk to your doctor or nurse

Hair loss often starts 2-3 weeks after chemo starts and will take about a week to fall out. It will grow back 2 to 3 months after chemo is over

Get fitted for a wig before hair loss. Some insurances may cover the cost of a wig

Cut your hair short or get a “buzz” cut (with electric shaver not a razor)

Satin pillow cases will cause less friction than cotton and may be more comfortable



MOUTH AND THROAT CHANGES

Dry mouth

Keep your mouth moist; ice chips, sugar free hard candies, sugar free gum or saliva substitutes

Changes in taste or smell

Infection of your gum, teeth or tongue

If possible, visit your dentist at least 2 weeks before starting chemotherapy

Use soft toothbrush

Mouth sores

Check your mouth and tongue every day

Rinse with mixture of $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp baking soda, $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp salt in 1 cup warm water after each meal and before bed at the start of 1st chemo and throughout treatment

Increased sensitivity to hot or cold foods

Choose soft , moist foods, cut into small pieces and eat foods at cool or room temperature



NAUSEA AND VOMITING

Chemotherapy can cause nausea and vomiting. You will receive medications based on your chemotherapy to try to prevent this

Take your antiemetic/anti nausea medications as prescribed, if nausea persists and lasts 24 hours call your doctor or nurse

Prevention:

- Bland easy-to-digest foods

- Eat a light meal or snack before treatment

- Eat small meals and snacks, eat foods that are warm or cool (not hot or cold)

- Relax, deep breathing

- Avoid foods and drinks with strong smells



NERVOUS SYSTEM CHANGES

Chemotherapy can cause nervous system damage. It may get better within a year of completion of chemotherapy, however, some may last for the rest of your life. It is important that you let your provider know if you have:

Tingling, burning , weakness, or numbness in your hands or feet

Feeling colder than normal

Pain with walking

Weak, sore, tired or achy muscles

Being clumsy or losing your balance

Trouble picking up objects

Hearing loss or ringing in your ears

Confusion or memory problems

Fatigue



SEXUAL CHANGES

WOMEN:

Hot flashes, vaginal dryness, feeling irritable, irregular or no menses

Bladder or vaginal infections, vaginal discharge or itching

Being too tired to have sex or not being interested in having sex or concerned about physical changes in your body

Feeling too worried, stressed or depressed to have sex

MEN:

Impotence (not being able to get or keep an erection)

Not being able to reach climax

Being too tired or not being interested in having sex

Feeling too worried, stressed or depressed to have sex



INFERTILITY

Some chemotherapy can cause a man or a woman to become infertile

In women it can lower the number of healthy eggs and also lower the hormones that produce them

It is very important to not get pregnant while having chemotherapy

Barrier contraception should be used during chemotherapy

In men it can lower or damage the sperm cells

It is just as important for men to not get their partner pregnant while they are receiving treatment as the chemo can damage the sperm causing birth defects

Barrier contraception should be used during chemotherapy



SKIN AND NAIL CHANGES

Minor skin changes may include:

Itching, dryness, redness, rashes, or peeling

Darker veins

Sensitivity to the sun. Always use sunblock of SPF 30 or greater

Nails may become dark, yellow, brittle or cracked. Sometimes they may even fall off

Acne

It is important to let your doctor or nurse know if you are experiencing any side effects, no matter how little they may seem



ALWAYS REPORT SYMPTOMS

No matter what kind of chemotherapy treatment you are getting, it is important to ALWAYS report any symptoms or concerns to your doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse, or therapist for prompt attention.

Many side effects are manageable

Your doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse, and therapists are here to help you through this time. They, with you and your family are part of the TEAM that are here to guide you.



References:

Chemotherapy and You: Support for People With Cancer. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/chemo-and-you>

NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms. (n.d.). Retrieved October 23, 2018, from <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/chemotherapy>

