

A QUICK GUIDE TO HAVING CHEMOTHERAPY

'Chemo' isn't just one drug. It's the name for lots of different medicines used to kill cancer cells.

The chemo travels in your blood stream to hunt down the cancer cells, wherever they are in your body. Cancer cells grow quickly and these 'cytotoxic drugs' are great at targeting them. But this is also the reason why chemo can come with those notorious side effects, like losing your hair. The drugs can't tell the difference between cancer cells and other 'healthy' fast growing cells, like hair.

We know that these side effects can be really upsetting. Remember, there are plenty of things that you and your hospital team can do to help you get through it.

When is chemotherapy used?

Chemotherapy can be used:

- as a main treatment for cancer
- to shrink a tumour before surgery or radiotherapy (neoadjuvant therapy)
- to reduce the risk of cancer coming back after surgery or radiotherapy (adjuvant therapy).

Some cancers, like leukaemia, need chemotherapy because the cancer cells are in the blood and therefore all over the body. Other times when a solid tumour is removed with surgery, chemotherapy will also be given to target any cancer cells that might be left.

Chemo and contraception

If you are on the pill or use an implant, either for contraception or to control periods, discuss this with your care team as some methods of contraception may be less effective. It's important not to become pregnant, or make someone pregnant, if you are having chemotherapy as it can affect an unborn baby. If you think you're already pregnant, tell your doctor. They'll need to know so they can protect you and your baby. You can always ask to speak to them privately if you need. Just make sure you tell them.

What are the side effects?

Chemo can't tell the difference between cancer cells and fast-growing healthy cells so it targets both. This is part of the reason you can get side effects. Everyone's different though. Some people don't have many problems (although that's not to say the treatment isn't working!).

Others might experience:

- Fatigue. Many people feel really tired
- Feeling sick and vomiting. This happens to about half of people and it depends on the chemotherapy you have
- Diarrhoea or constipation
- Hair loss
- Getting infections
- Losing weight, or gaining it
- Changes in appetite or your sense of taste
- Sore mouth and gums
- Skin problems
- Concentration and memory problems
- Sleep problems
- Fertility issues
- Emotional changes, particularly if your treatment includes steroids.

Most of these side effects are temporary and should improve once you complete your treatment.

Are there any long term effects?

Some drugs can cause particular longer term effects on your heart, renal system, hearing or other organs. If these drugs are used, your doctor will monitor you throughout your treatment to see what effect they are having on your body, and might change the treatments or dosage if necessary.

Do talk to your specialist about dealing with side effects. It's often possible to reduce or treat side effects, so make sure you let your care team know how you are getting on with your treatment.

What isn't normal?

Very rarely some drugs can cause suicidal thoughts. If this happens to you, please tell someone on your medical team immediately. It might just be a case of changing up your medication.

How chemotherapy can affect fertility

Some treatments affect women's ovaries, which can mean periods stop temporarily or permanently, leading to an early menopause. In men, it can reduce or stop sperm production which may be temporary, but for some it is permanent. Although having kids might be the last thing on your mind right now, make sure you talk to your doctor or nurse about this before you start treatment. They should be able to give you an idea of how at risk you are with your treatment plan, or could refer you to a fertility clinic for specialist advice and treatment that could preserve your fertility and give you options for the future.

How is chemotherapy given?

There are loads of different chemotherapy drugs. You might need just one drug or a mix of different ones. Your specialist will base this on your cancer type and how advanced it is - and choose the best ones for you.

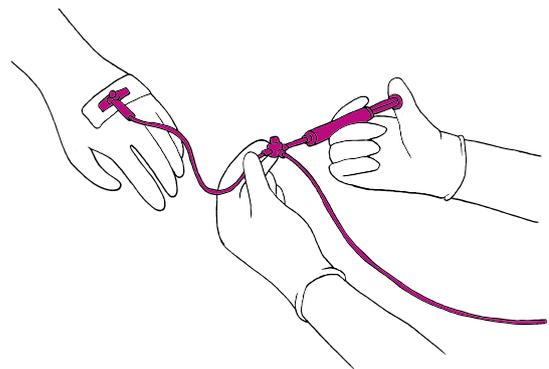
It's common to have chemo intravenously, which means given directly into a vein. It can also be given as a tablet or liquid to take by mouth, or injected. You might have to have a combination of these methods, or just one.

For some types of chemo, You can go to the clinic, have your treatment and then go home. Others will mean a stay in hospital. And some can be given at home.

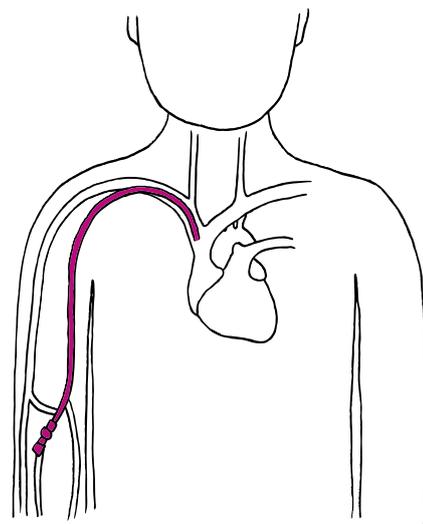
Ways to have intravenous chemotherapy

Intravenous chemotherapy always involves inserting a thin tube (or 'line') into your vein, but this can be done in different ways.

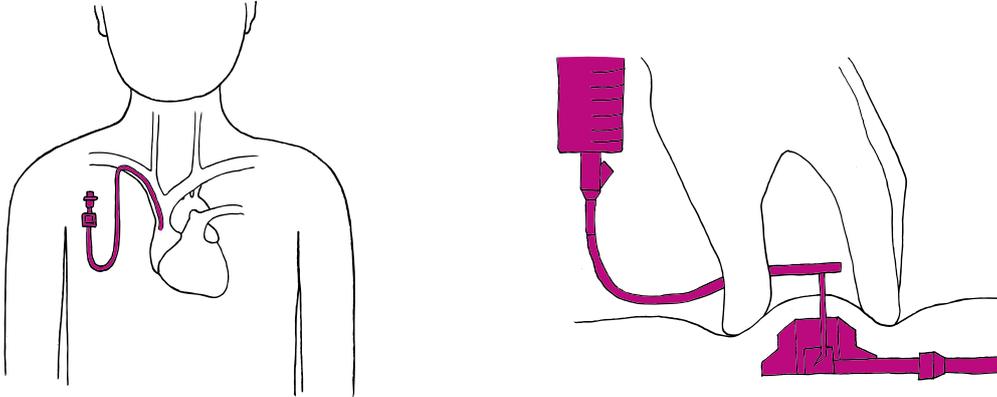
A cannula is put into your hand or arm. These are usually put in specifically for each treatment and taken out immediately afterwards.



A PICC line is a thin, flexible tube which is inserted into a vein in your arm. It's slid along until it reaches a large vein in your chest and will stay in place until your treatment is over



A central line is a tube placed into a vein in your chest, usually the one that lies just under your collarbone. There are different types of central line. With a Hickman or Broviac line, the end of the tube is on the outside of your chest and is sealed with a cap. **A portacath** is located under your skin and accessed with a needle when it's needed. The central line is put in place while you are under anaesthetic and can stay in place for weeks or months.



Chemotherapy is usually given in cycles. You'll have several days or weeks of treatment, then a rest period, then more treatment. The number of these cycles will depend on things like the type of cancer you have and how well it's responding to treatment. Some people need just one cycle, while others will have many.

Who are we?

CLIC Sargent is a charity dedicated to supporting young people like you. We help people with cancer aged 24 and under from diagnosis onwards. To find out more about how we can help you and your family, or for more information about living with cancer, visit clicsargent.org.uk