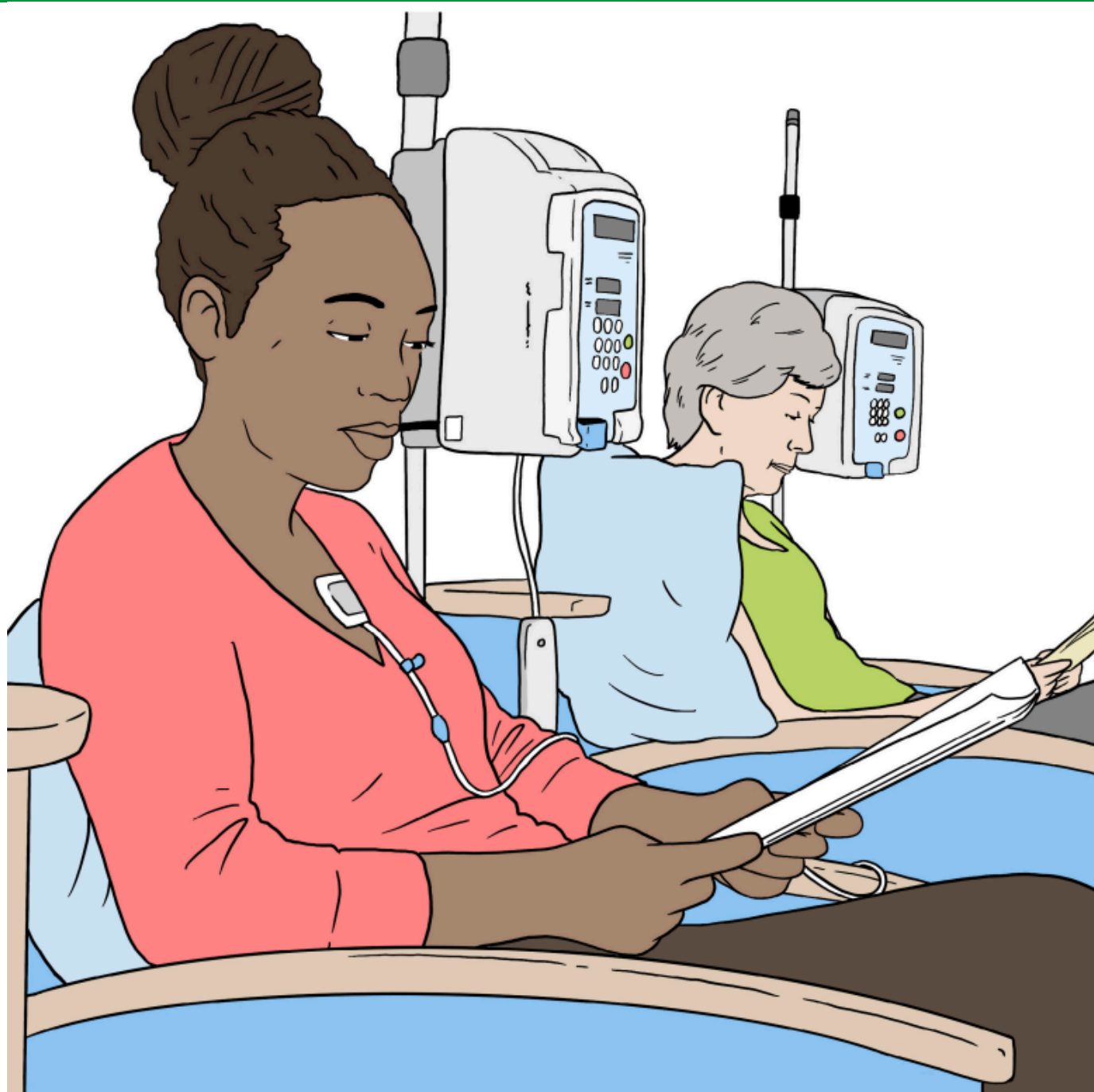


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easy
read
Australia

Chemotherapy



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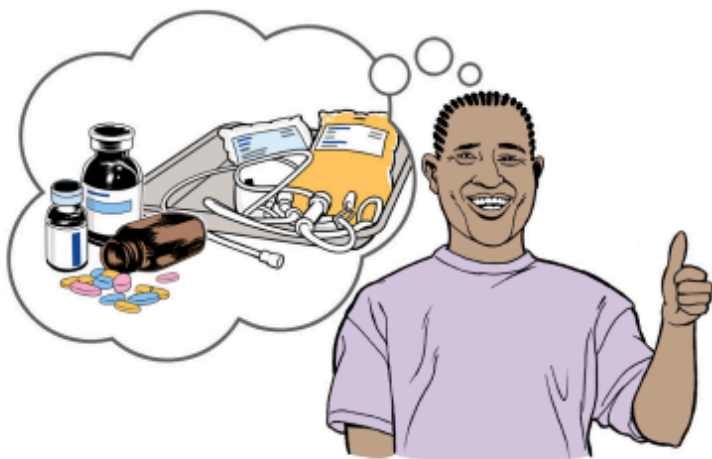




About this easy read booklet



This booklet is about chemotherapy.



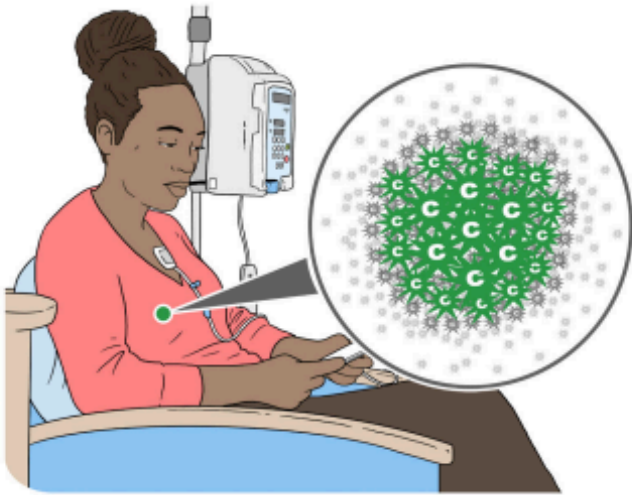
You can learn about what will happen at the hospital when you go for chemotherapy.



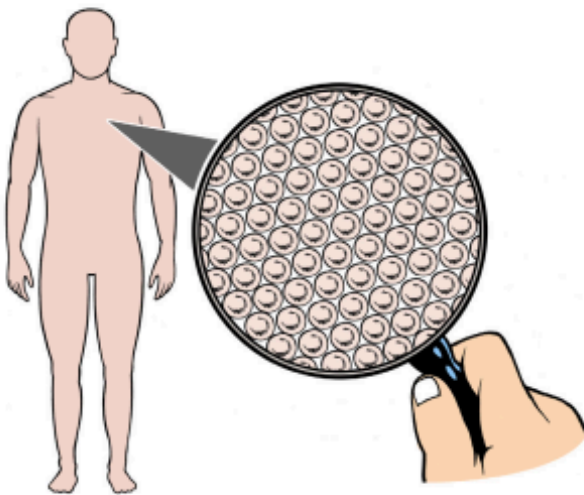
If you are worried about your health, you should talk to a doctor or nurse.



Chemotherapy



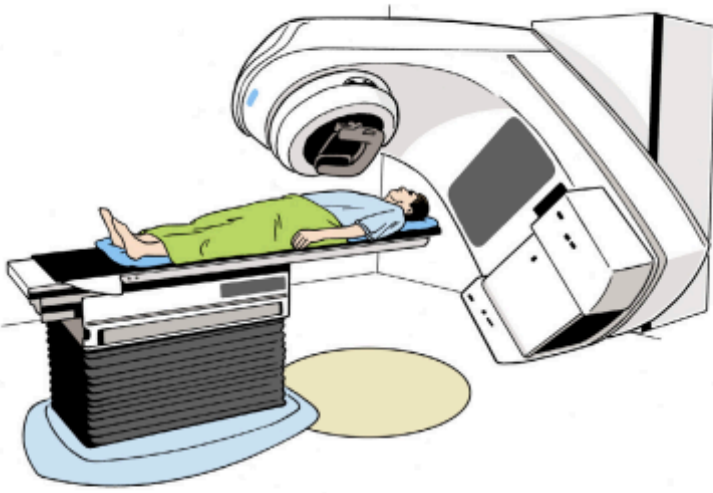
Chemotherapy is a type of treatment for cancer. It uses special drugs to kill cancer **cells** in the body.



Cells are the tiny building blocks that make up people's bodies.



Some types of cancer can be treated with just chemotherapy. Sometimes chemotherapy is used with other treatments like:



- **Radiotherapy**

This is a treatment that uses powerful x-rays to kill cancer cells.



- **Surgery**

This is when a doctor removes, replaces or fixes something inside your body. This is also called an operation.



- **Other cancer drugs**

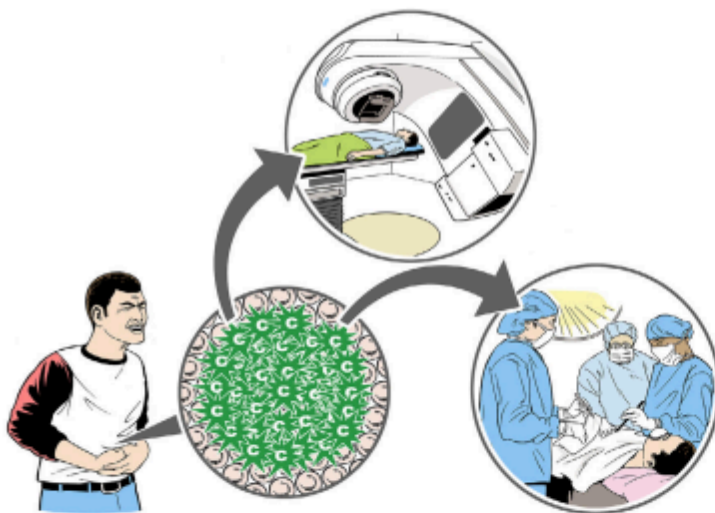


Why chemotherapy is given



Chemotherapy is given for different reasons:

- it can be given because it is the best way to get rid of the cancer



- it can be given because other treatments are not enough on their own to get rid of the cancer



- it can be given to help you feel better or live longer.



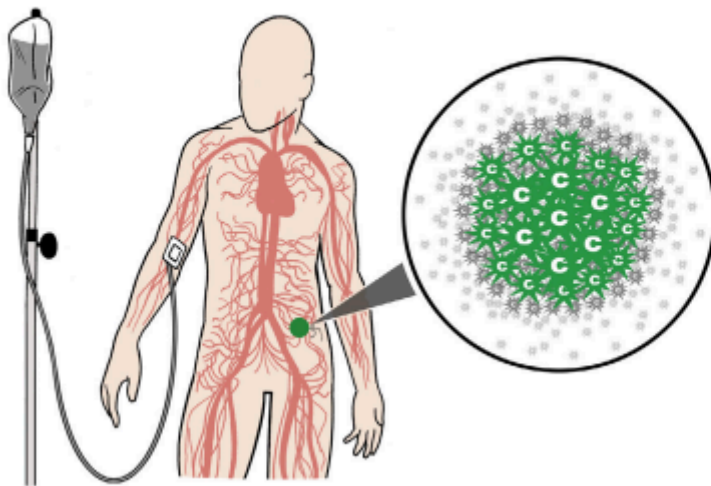
How chemotherapy works



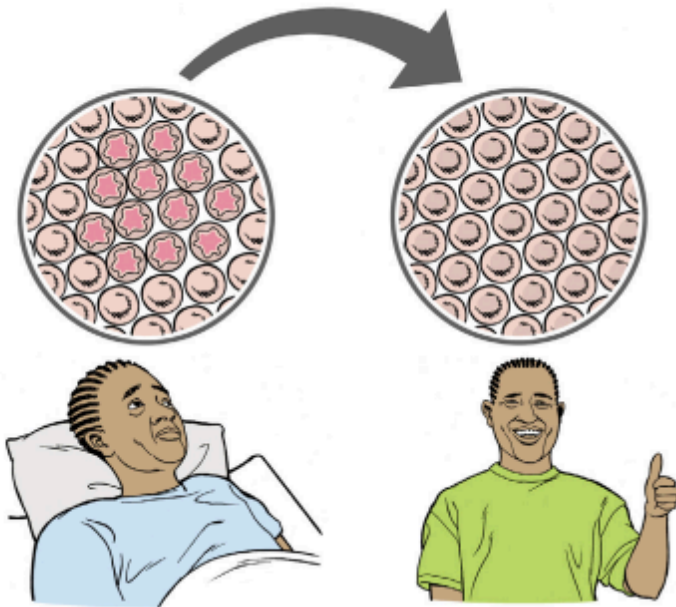
There are lots of different types of chemotherapy drugs.



Each person will be given different drugs depending on what type of cancer they have.



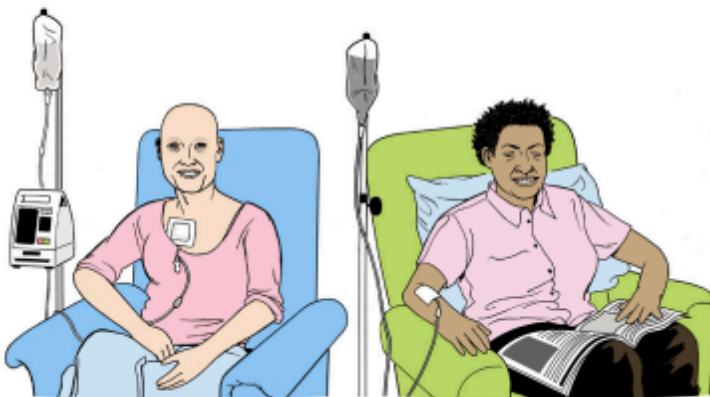
Many of the drugs travel through the body in your blood. They work by damaging the cancer cells so they cannot spread or make more cancer cells.



The drugs can also damage some of the healthy cells in your body. But healthy cells can usually mend themselves and get back to normal after a short time.



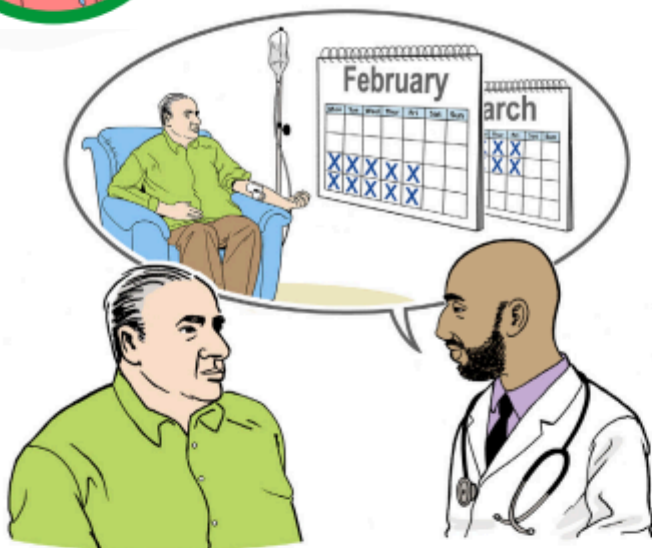
The effects of the drugs on healthy cells can cause side effects, like tiredness or feeling sick.



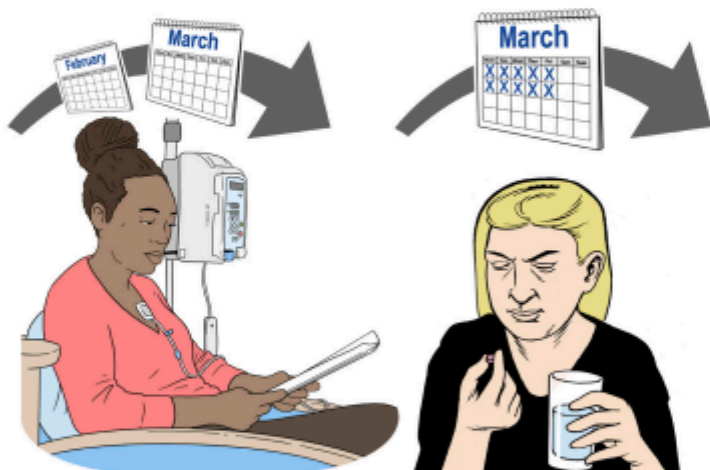
Some people will only have a few side effects and others may have more.



Having chemotherapy



Your doctor will tell you when you will need treatment.



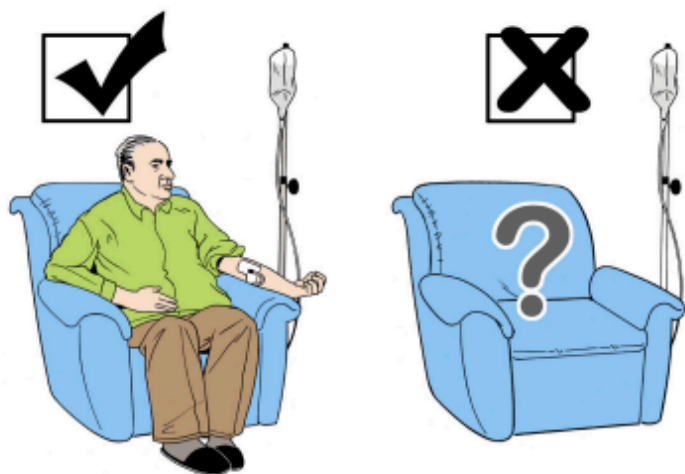
Some people have treatment for a few weeks. Other people might need to have treatment for a few months or longer.



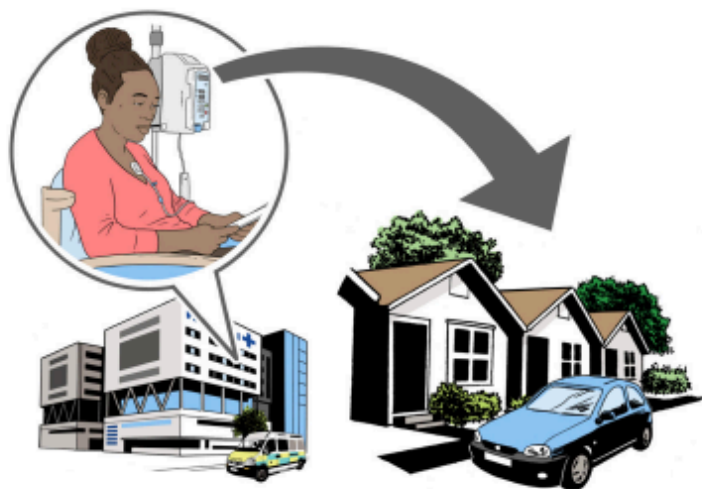
People usually have some treatments and then have a break from the treatments.



Over the time you are having chemotherapy, your doctor will keep checking to see how the treatment is working. They might change your treatment.



It is very important that you keep going for your chemotherapy even if you feel unwell. If you miss treatment it will not work as well to treat the cancer.



Usually people come to the hospital for treatment and then go home on the same day.



If you are ill and already in hospital, then you will be given your treatment there.



Chemotherapy can be given in different ways. The main ways are by tablets or capsules, or by injections.



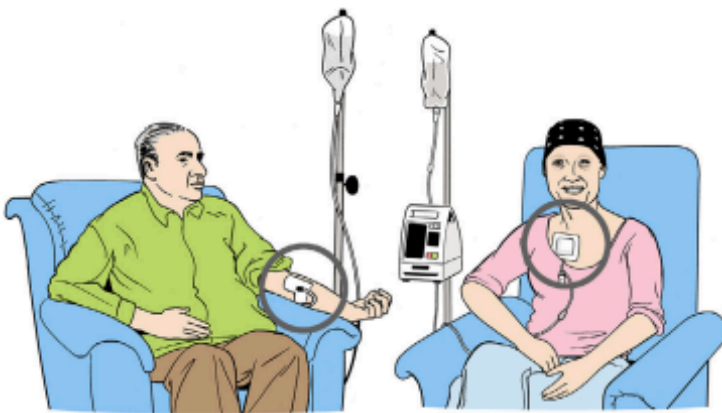
Tablets and capsules

Your doctor or nurse will tell you how many to take and how often to take them.

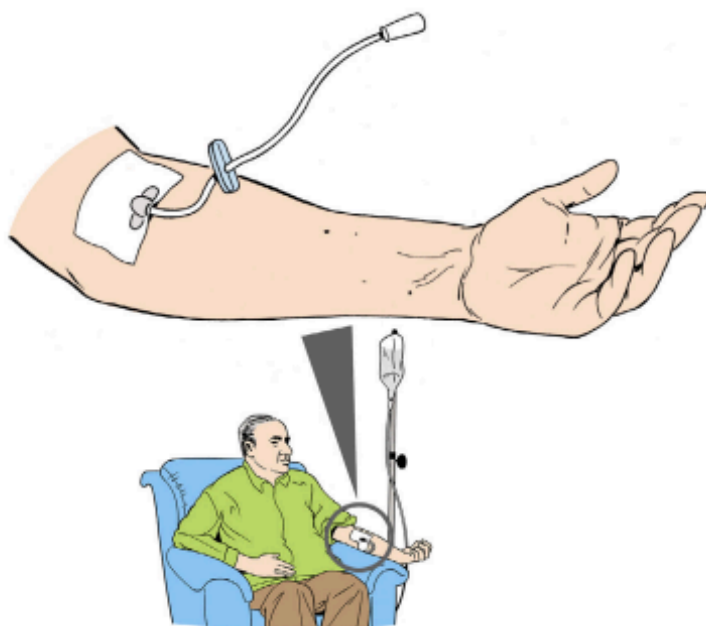


It is very important to take your tablets. You may need support with this.

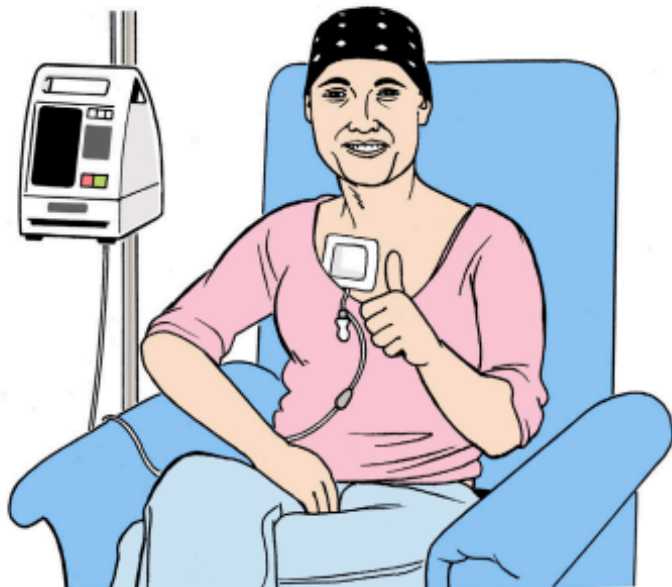
Injection



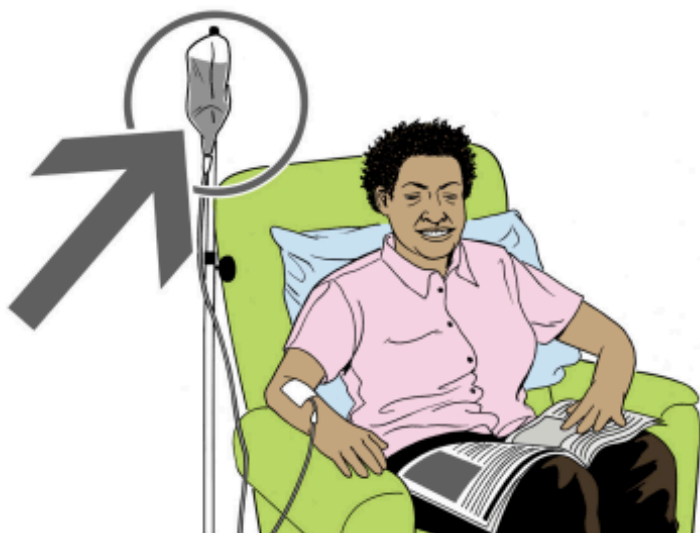
This means putting the drugs into your body through a needle. The nurse can inject chemotherapy drugs into different places on your body.



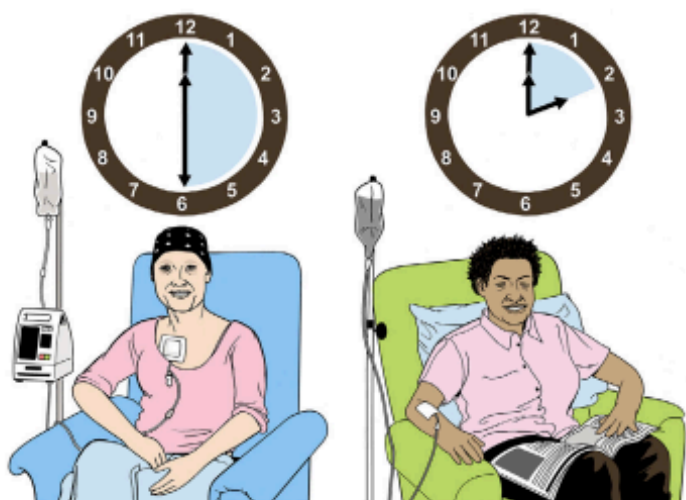
You will usually need to have lots of treatments, so the nurse may put a small tube under your skin. This is called a **line** or a **port**. The tube stays there all the way through your treatment.



This makes it easier to give you the drugs without you having lots of injections.



The chemotherapy drugs can be given into the tube from a bag of liquid called a drip. Or the nurse can slowly inject the drugs in.



This can take from half an hour up to several hours.

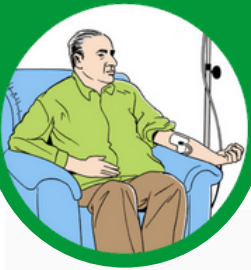


You have to sit still while this is happening. This can be boring so it is good to have a friend to talk to.



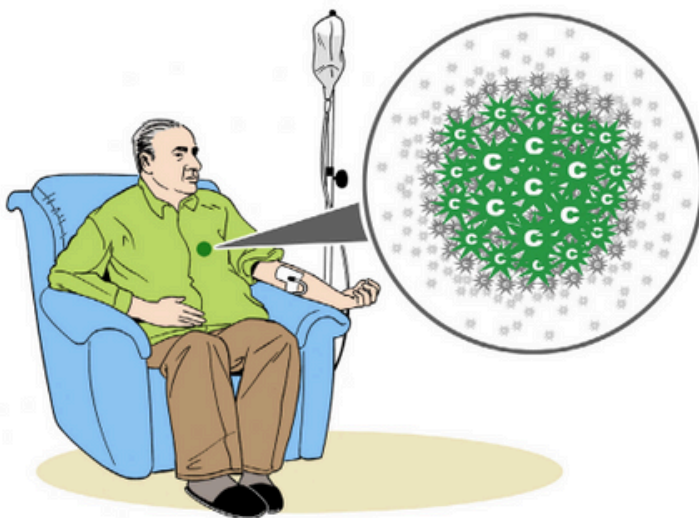
You can bring your own music to listen to or something to read.

Side effects from chemotherapy



Some people worry about having **chemotherapy** because it can cause **side effects**.

These are unwanted effects, like tiredness or feeling sick.



Chemotherapy is a cancer treatment where you are given drugs to kill cancer cells in your body.



Your doctor or nurse can tell you about side effects you may have.



They can also tell you about what might happen if you do not have chemotherapy.



You can then decide if you want to have the treatment or not.



Infection



When you are having chemotherapy you might get **infections** more easily, like a cold or flu.



An **infection** is when germs attack your body. Infections might make you feel unwell, shivery or very hot.



There are things you can do that may stop you getting an infection:

- wash your hands often



- stay away from people who have colds or other illnesses you can catch



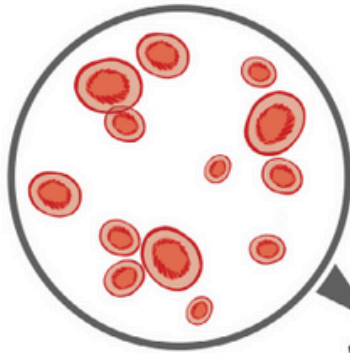
- stay away from places with lots of people – you can wear a mask if you are in busy places.



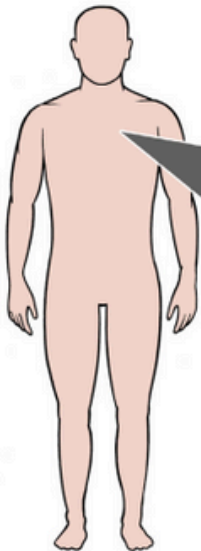
It is very important to tell your doctor if you feel hot and ill so they can give you medicine.



Anaemia



Anaemia can happen when your blood does not have enough red blood **cells** in it.



Cells are the tiny building blocks that make up people's bodies.



Anaemia can make you feel very tired and out of breath.



It can make you feel dizzy.



It can also make your joints and muscles ache.



Your doctor can treat you for anaemia.



Bleeding and bruising



You may have nosebleeds or bleeding gums.

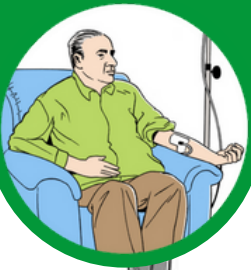


You may have bruises on your body and not know why.

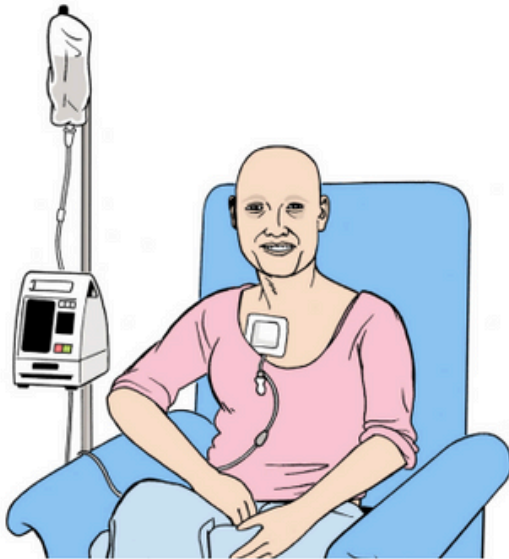


If you have any bruising or bleeding, it is important to see your doctor straight away.

Losing your hair



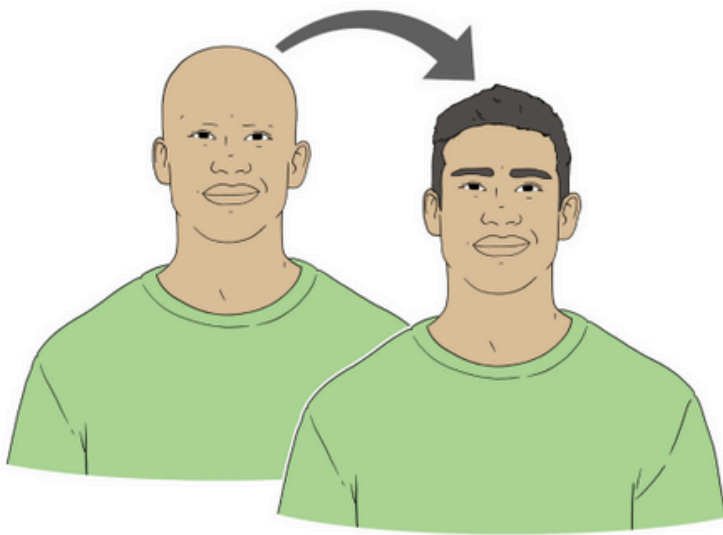
Some chemotherapy drugs do not change your hair very much.



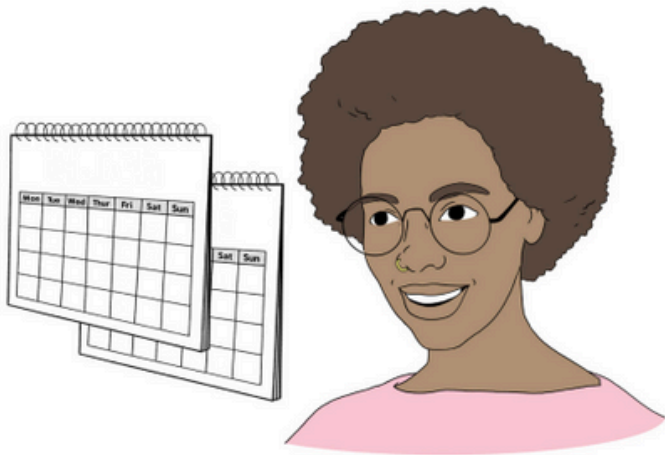
Other chemotherapy drugs can damage your hair or make it all fall out. This can be very upsetting.



Sometimes these drugs can also make your body hair, like your armpit and **pubic hair**, fall out too.



Your hair will usually grow back after your treatment ends.



If you have afro hair, this can take a long time to grow back.



There are things you can do to look after your hair, even if you are losing it.

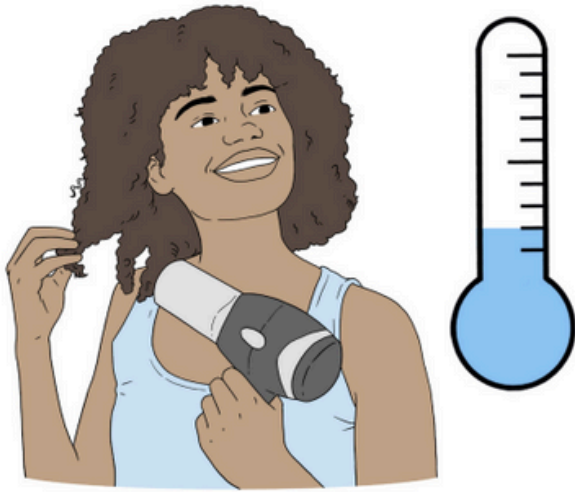


These include things like:

- brush or comb your hair gently



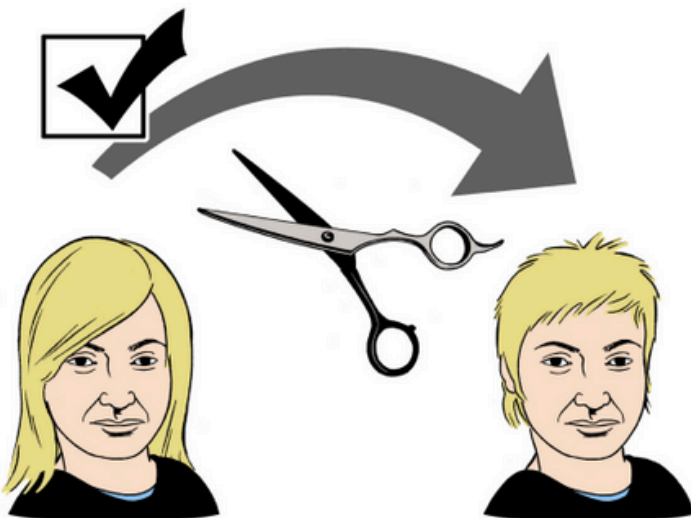
- if you want to dye your hair, talk to your nurse first



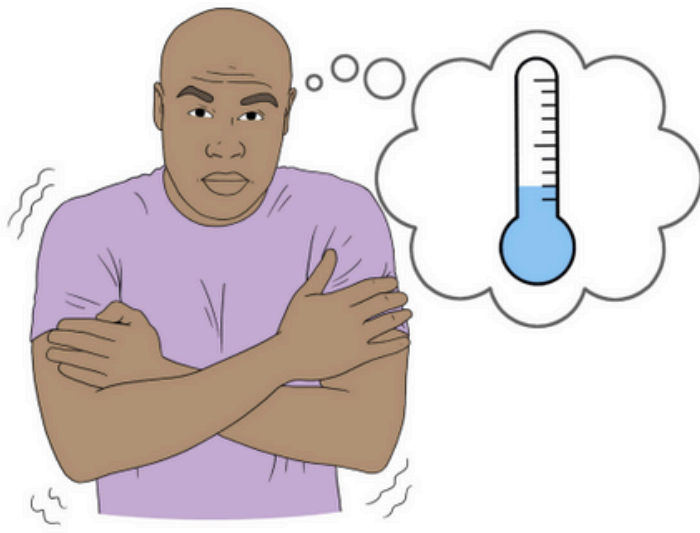
- if you use a hairdryer, keep it on a low heat



- do not use hair straighteners or hair curlers too often



- you could cut your hair short, so the weight does not pull it out quicker.



You may feel cold when you have lost your hair.



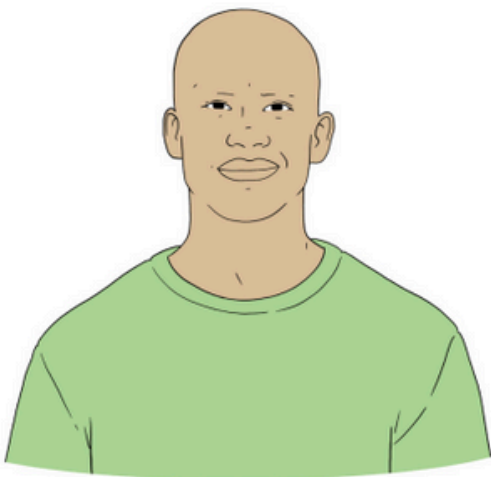
You can wear hats, scarves, turbans or other head coverings to cover your head.



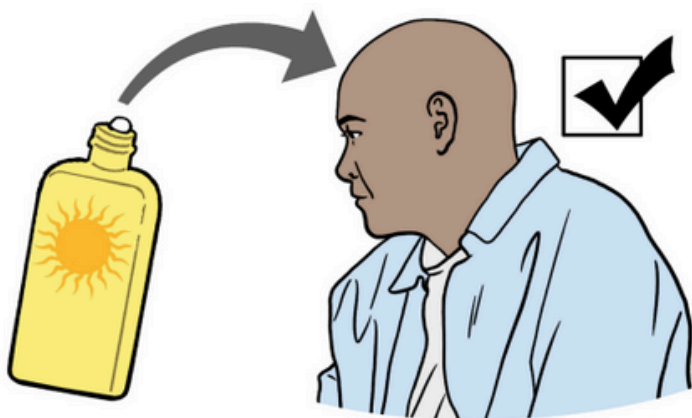
You could wear a wig.



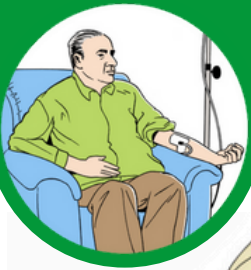
You can ask the doctor or nurse about wigs before your treatment starts. You may be able to get a wig that is the same colour as your own hair.



Some people prefer not to wear a head covering.



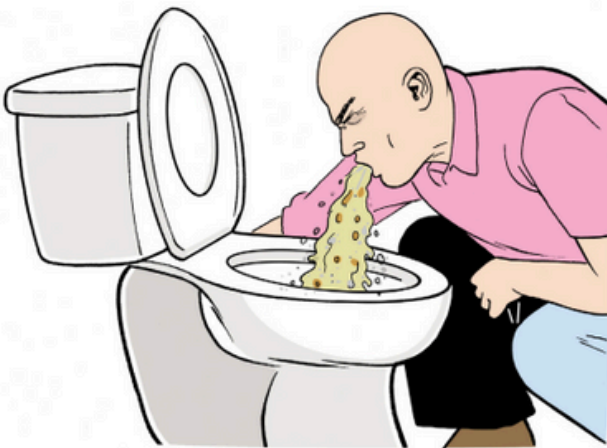
You need to protect your scalp from the sun even if you have black or brown skin.



Feeling sick or being sick



Some chemotherapy drugs can make you feel sick. Feeling sick is also called **nausea**. It can sometimes make you feel dizzy.



Some chemotherapy drugs can make you be sick. This may start while you have your treatment, or a few hours later.



There are things that can help if you are feeling sick or being sick:



- To stop you feeling sick the doctor can give you anti-sickness drugs before you have your chemotherapy. This might be an injection or tablets.



- You can also get some tablets to take home in case you feel sick at other times.



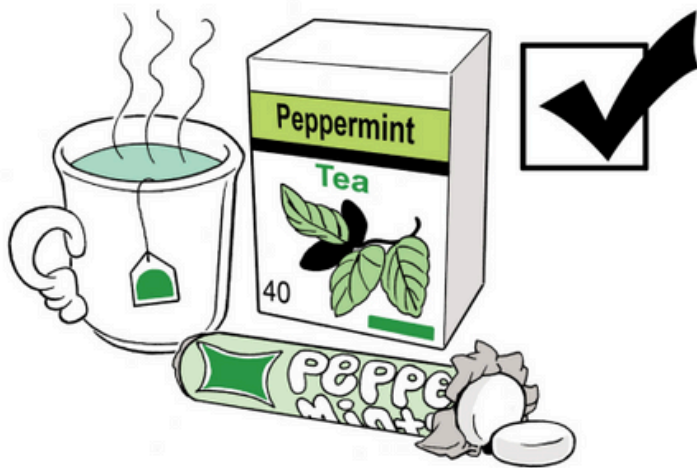
- Do not eat fried food and strong smelling foods.



- Just eat small amounts of food you do like and feel OK eating.



- Food and drinks with ginger in them can help you feel better. Try ginger tea or ginger biscuits.



- Peppermints or peppermint tea can also help.



- Make sure you try to drink lots of liquids. Sip them slowly.



Losing your appetite



Chemotherapy drugs can make you feel less hungry than you usually do. This is called a **loss of appetite**.



Even if you do not feel hungry, it is important to eat something. Food will give you strength and energy.



There are things that can help if you have lost your appetite:

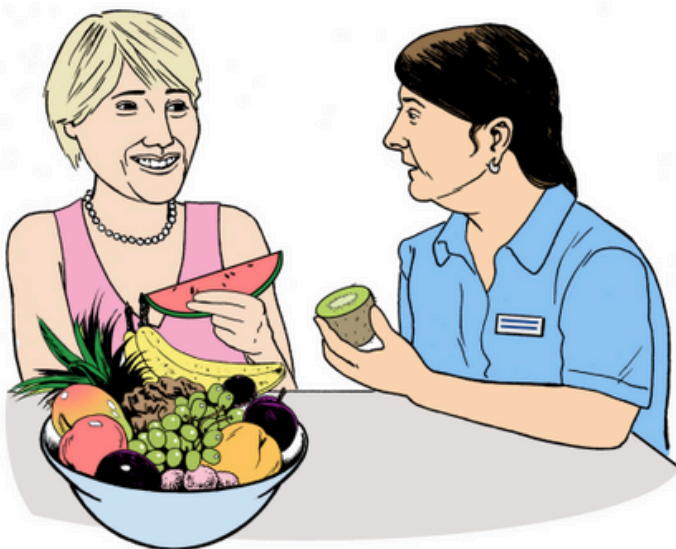
- Eat small amounts more often instead of big meals.



- Eat healthy snacks like nuts or fruit.



- You can have special high energy drinks instead of some meals. Ask your **dietitian** about these.



A **dietitian** knows about food. They can help with problems with eating and food.



Problems going to the toilet



Some chemotherapy drugs can give you **diarrhoea**. This is when your poo is watery and runny. You may have to go to the toilet more than usual.



Some chemotherapy drugs can give you **constipation**. This is when you find it hard to poo. Some anti-sickness drugs can do this too.



There are things that can help if you have problems going to the toilet:

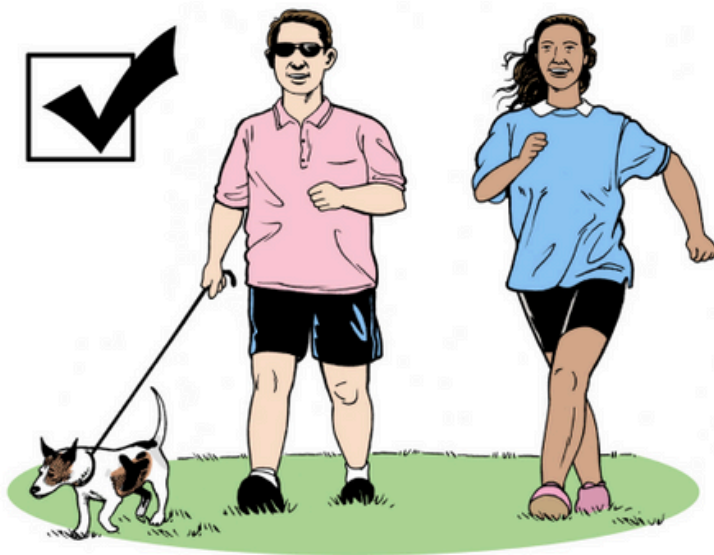
- If you have diarrhoea then you need to change what you are eating. Try not to eat cereals, raw fruits and vegetables.



- Try to drink lots of liquids such as water.



- If you have constipation, try to eat more fibre. Fibre is in brown bread, raw fruits and fruit juice, cereals and vegetables.



- Gentle exercise helps with constipation so try to have a walk every day.



Your sense of taste



Chemotherapy can make your food and drink taste strange.



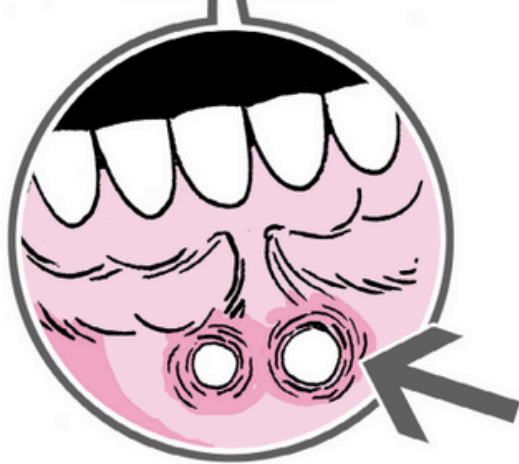
This often stops after your treatment ends.



It can help to eat things that you like but try to eat healthy food.



Your mouth



Some chemotherapy drugs can make your mouth sore and cause **mouth ulcers**. These are painful sores in your mouth, usually on the inside of your cheeks or lips.

Mouth ulcers can get infected and be sore.

There are things that can help if you have a sore mouth or mouth ulcers:

- Tell your doctor if you have a sore mouth. They can give you mouthwashes, creams or gels.





- Clean your teeth gently and often with a soft toothbrush.



- Do not eat foods and drinks that will hurt your mouth, like grapefruit or spicy food.



- Drink soothing drinks like herbal teas and water.



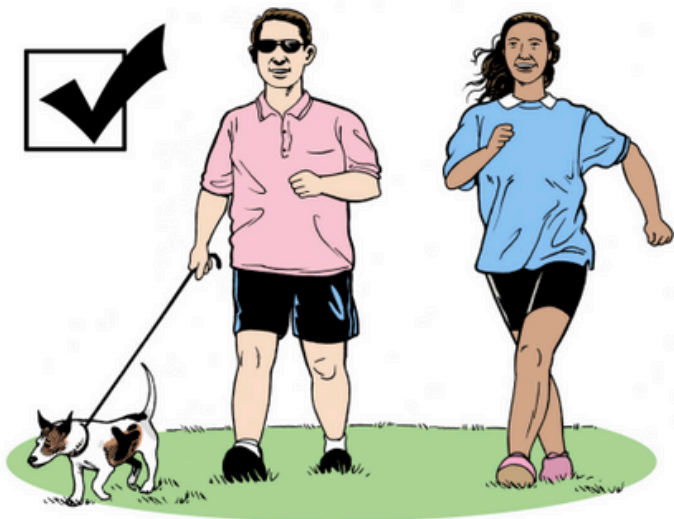
- If you have hot drinks, let them cool down before you drink them. Very hot drinks can hurt your mouth.



Tiredness



Chemotherapy can often make you feel very tired.



There are things that can help if you feel very tired:

- Try to do a little exercise every day. This will help you feel less tired.



- Rest as much as you can.



- Try to cut down the amount of things you have to do.



- Ask other people to help you do things.



When your treatment ends it may take a few months for you to feel less tired and get your normal energy back.



Changes to your skin and nails



Chemotherapy drugs can change your skin and nails. Your skin can become dry and itchy.



Your skin can become more sensitive to the sun and you can burn more easily.

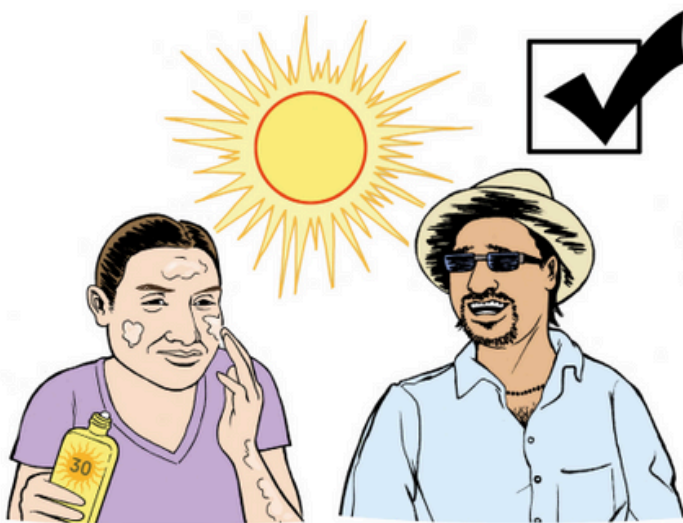


Your nails may change colour and break more easily.



There are things that can help if you have changes to your skin and nails:

- Use moisturising cream on dry skin.



- Protect yourself in the sun by using high protection sun cream. You should also wear a hat and loose clothes with long sleeves.



There are other side effects that can happen too. Remember not all these side effects may happen to you. If you feel unwell in any way, talk to your doctor or nurse. They can help. Ask for an interpreter if you need it.

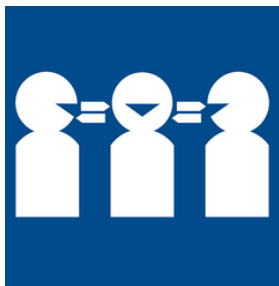


If you need more information



For more information or support
in Australia:

Phone Cancer Council on
13 11 20



For language support, call

13 14 50

Ask for Cancer Council Victoria.



Or go to the website

www.cancervic.org.au

For more easy read booklets on many cancer topics, go to
macmillan.org.uk/easyread.

These booklets are made in the UK, so some information may not
be the same in Australia.