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Testicular cancer awareness, advice and support for  
men in the UK affected by testicular cancer.

# Chemotherapy effects



ORCHID   
FIGHTING MALE CANCER

[www.yourprivates.org.uk](http://www.yourprivates.org.uk)

# Chemotherapy effects

**While the chemotherapy drugs are acting on the cancer cells in your body, they may also temporarily reduce the number of normal cells in your blood. When these cells are in short supply, you may be more likely to get an infection and to tire easily. It is important to let your cancer specialist team know straight away if you feel unwell or develop a temperature at any time during your treatment.**

During chemotherapy your blood will be tested regularly to make sure your white blood cells, responsible for fighting infection, and your kidneys are functioning correctly. If necessary, you will be given antibiotics to treat any infection.

Before chemotherapy you will also need to have a hearing test (audiogram) as chemotherapy can affect your hearing as well as a breathing test as some chemotherapy can sometimes affect your lungs.

Chemotherapy can temporarily cause infertility so you will be advised to store some sperm (sperm banking).

Below are some of the common and less common side effects associated with chemotherapy along with some tips that people have found useful on how to manage the symptoms. Some of this advice can also be used if you are having radiotherapy.

# Potential chemotherapy side effects

Common side effects of chemotherapy:

Try:

Avoid:

**Nausea and vomiting:**

- Anti sickness medication will be given on a regular basis and it is important to take this.
- Ginger, beer, tea or biscuits (eat regularly throughout the day)
- Peppermint tea, always drink slowly taking lots of sips
- A small meal a few hours before your chemo starts

**Never have chemotherapy on an empty stomach**

- Hot and spicy foods (curry, Cajun cooking etc.)
- Foods with high sugar content
- Fatty and greasy foods (chips, burgers etc.)
- Large meals
- Eating and drinking too fast and drinking with meals
- Alcohol
- Caffeine (which is found in tea/coffee/chocolate including chocolate bars/ energy drinks)
- Baby food this is designed for babies and has very little nutrition for adults!

## Helpful tip

Peppermint tea can help take away the side effect of nausea and vomiting

See above for more tips



Common side effects of chemotherapy:	Try:	Avoid:
<b>Taste:</b> (chemo can cause a metallic taste in your mouth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh pineapple or other sharp tasting fruit</li> <li>• Boiled sweets while having treatment</li> <li>• Seasoned or marinated meat for your meals to add flavour</li> <li>• Use herbs and spices in your cooking to add stronger taste</li> </ul>	
<b>Mouth sores or ulcers from chemotherapy:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh pineapple can help prevent and heal mouth ulcers by stimulating saliva which protects your mouth</li> <li>• Bonjela</li> <li>• Soft child's/baby bristle toothbrush and baby/soothing (for instance) aloe vera toothpaste</li> <li>• Soft puréed or liquid diet to prevent chewing</li> <li>• Rinse your mouth with salt water on a regular basis if you can tolerate it up to 4-5 times a day</li> <li>• Try sucking crushed ice during treatment</li> <li>• Artificial saliva which can be prescribed by your doctor</li> <li>• Vaseline for your lips</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid tomato and citrus fruit based products and tobacco</li> <li>• Avoid oral care products that may cause a dry mouth and products that contain alcohol or peroxide</li> <li>• Hot and spicy foods (curry, Cajun etc.)</li> <li>• Nuts and seeds</li> </ul>

## Helpful tip

Fresh pineapple or other sharp tasting fruit can help take away the metallic taste in your mouth

See above for more tips



Common side effects of chemotherapy:	Try:	Avoid:
<b>Tiredness:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you cannot sleep to your normal pattern, try and get small restful naps, not too many however as you may not sleep in the night</li> <li>• Some people find benefit in meditating</li> <li>• Sleeping tablets can be prescribed if insomnia becomes a big problem</li> </ul>	
<b>Loss of appetite:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try small frequent meals throughout the day</li> <li>• Try fortified soups/drinks or milk shakes of your favourite combinations</li> </ul>	
<b>Diarrhoea:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rice and pasta</li> <li>• Potatoes with skins</li> <li>• Dry crackers/biscuits</li> <li>• White bread</li> <li>• Bananas (a good source of potassium which is essential for your body's metabolism). Excessive diarrhoea will deplete potassium levels</li> </ul>	
<b>Hair loss:</b> <b>This may occur 2-3 weeks after chemotherapy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baseball cap</li> <li>• Shave your hair off when it starts to fall out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head cooling devices may reduce the circulating blood supply which can reduce the effectiveness of the chemo</li> </ul>

<b>Common side effects of chemotherapy:</b>	<b>Try:</b>	<b>Avoid:</b>
<b>Low immune system from chemotherapy:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pay meticulous attention to your hygiene. Wash your hands after going to the toilet!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travelling to foreign countries where risk of picking up illness is greater</li> <li>• Vaccines. Ask your oncologist when you will be able to travel and receive vaccines after treatment</li> </ul>
<b>Tingling in your arms and feet due to nerve damage (peripheral neuropathy) from chemotherapy:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep your hands and feet warm and avoid extremes of temperature</li> <li>• Make sure you take care when preparing food (use gloves) or when running hot water (test with your elbow) as you may risk burning yourself</li> <li>• Gentle exercise</li> </ul>	
<b>Inflammation in the lungs with shortness of breath due to low circulating haemoglobin (oxygenated blood) from chemotherapy:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may need a blood transfusion</li> <li>• Rest</li> <li>• Tell your doctor if you are experiencing breathing difficulty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid taxing, strenuous tasks</li> <li>• Do not smoke!</li> </ul>

## Helpful tip

Some people find that non perfumed moisturising creams may help with skin changes.

See opposite for more tips



Common side effects of chemotherapy:	Try:	Avoid:
<p><b>Short of breath with dizziness due Anaemia. This is due to low circulating haemoglobin</b></p>	<p>If anaemia is severe may require blood transfusion. Your Doctor will be able to tell you if you need one. Eat green leafy vegetables and some red meat as are rich in iron. Most nutrients can be obtained from eating normal food.</p>	<p>smoking, getting up too quickly as can cause sudden fainting. Avoid taking a lot of supplements without consulting your doctor.</p>
<p><b>Tinnitus (ringing in the ears) from chemotherapy:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage people to speak slowly and clearly to you</li> <li>• Some people find that listening to gentle background music may help</li> <li>• Tell your doctor if you are experiencing hearing problems</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Skin changes:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electric shave to avoid cuts</li> <li>• Non perfumed moisturizing creams</li> <li>• Chemo can make your skin more sensitive to sunlight, check with your oncologist to see how long you should avoid prolonged exposure for and make sure you are using at least factor 15 if sunbathing</li> <li>• Allow 6 weeks after radiotherapy treatment before exposure to the sun it may be best to cover the treated area for up to a year</li> <li>• wear a hat in summer to avoid sun burn to the scalp.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wet shaving which may break your skin</li> <li>• For radiotherapy it is useful to avoid non perfumed soaps and have tepid baths. Avoid vigorous rubbing of the skin around the treated area</li> <li>• sun bathing in direct sun light as at risk of severe sun burn which can leave you scarred for life.</li> </ul>



## **Helpful tip**

**Pay attention to your  
hygiene and always  
wash your hands.**

See opposite for more tips