

You may also need blood tests to check how well your liver and kidneys are working. This is because chemotherapy drugs are broken down by the liver and passed out of your body via the kidneys. Depending on your general health and the drugs that you are taking you may need to have some other tests before your treatment begins.

Always let your specialist cancer team know if you are taking any other medication, including dietary supplements (such as vitamins and minerals) or herbal medicines. We cannot be certain how these may affect chemotherapy treatment and your team may advise you to avoid some of these while you are having treatment.

Treatment

Most chemotherapy drugs are given as a course of up to ten sessions (cycles) of treatment. This will depend on the type of drug you are having. At each treatment session you will be given the chemotherapy drug through a drip (infusion). This involves running a liquid containing the drug through a fine tube (cannula) into a vein in your arm. This allows the drug to enter the bloodstream and travel throughout the body.

You will have treatment every three or four weeks. A treatment of docetaxel takes about one hour (this may differ from other chemotherapy drugs). If your blood count is not high enough to cope with a cycle of treatment your doctor may decide to reduce your dose of chemotherapy or delay the cycle. Once your blood count returns to normal you can continue with your treatment.

Your doctor may give you steroid tablets such as prednisolone, as part of your chemotherapy treatment. Your doctor will give you more information about when to take these tablets.

At your first appointment you will be given phone numbers of who to contact if you have any questions about your treatment. This should include someone you can contact after normal hours. Be sure to call if you have any concerns, even if you think they are not very important, and especially if you have persistent or severe side effects.

It is perfectly safe to be around other people, including children and pregnant women, when you are having chemotherapy, but you will need to try to avoid contact with people who have infections. This is because your ability to fight infections (your immunity) is not as strong as usual during each chemotherapy cycle. You are most at risk between seven and 14 days after your treatment. Some men choose to avoid very crowded areas during this time to help reduce the risk of getting an infection.

If at any time, you think that you may have a fever or infection it is important to contact the hospital immediately for advice. You can call any time of the day or night and should not wait to see if you feel better. It may be useful to have a thermometer at home to check your temperature. If you do not feel well take your temperature and call the hospital straight away.

A personal experience

"I had a firm telling off by my GP for delaying calling when I had signs of an infection. I learnt my lesson to call even if I think it's something trivial."

You should not have any immunisations with live vaccines during your chemotherapy or for six months after, but it is safe to be around others who have had these types of vaccines. Other immunisations such as the flu jab are safe, but may not give you as much protection as usual. This is because your white blood cells may be low due to your treatment. It is always best to check with your doctor or nurse before having any vaccination.

What are the side effects?

Because chemotherapy attacks cells that are dividing quickly it not only affects the cancer cells but also other healthy cells in the body that divide rapidly. This includes the cells in the lining of the mouth, intestines, hair follicles, finger and toe nails and bone marrow. Chemotherapy can harm these cells and cause side effects. Most of the side effects are temporary and your body will recover once the treatment finishes.

chemotherapy treatment. This may be caused by some of the side effects from treatment such as feeling sick or having a sore mouth. If your appetite is smaller than usual, eating small meals and having regular healthy snacks may help you to get the nutrients you need and stop you from losing weight.

Chemotherapy can cause taste changes and food may taste more salty, bitter or metallic. Taste changes can sometimes cause men to avoid certain foods. If you do not feel like eating much it is important to drink plenty of fluids and to find foods that are more appealing to you. You may find that you prefer foods that you did not usually eat before you started treatment. The steroids that you will be given with your chemotherapy should help with improving your appetite.

A personal experience

'During chemotherapy, I found that most foods tasted a bit funny. Someone advised me to avoid my favourite foods during treatment as their taste would be disappointing and may put me off them. Save your favourite meals for after your treatment has finished.'

If you are finding it difficult to eat meals you can get a prescription from your GP for special drinks that provide extra nutrition. You can also talk to your specialist team if you are having problems eating a balanced diet or if you are losing weight. They may be able to refer you to an oncology dietitian who can give you advice that is specific to your needs.

Feeling and being sick

Chemotherapy drugs can make you feel sick during treatment. There are many anti-sickness drugs (anti-emetics) that can help to control this. These can be taken as injections into the vein, or tablets just before each chemotherapy treatment. You can also take some anti-sickness tablets home with you. It is important to take them as directed by your doctor before meals.

If the smell of food is putting you off eating, try to avoid strong smelling foods. If possible you could also ask someone to prepare and cook your meals for you. Let your specialist team

or GP know if you continue to experience nausea or vomiting.

Other possible side effects

Each individual chemotherapy drug may also have its own particular side effects.

For example, docetaxel causes fluid retention (oedema) in about seven per cent of men (seven out of every 100 men). This means that your hands and feet may swell and you may gain some weight.

If you are having treatment with mitoxantrone, your urine may become a green/blue colour for 24 hours after each treatment.

You may feel a bit down during your treatment. Some people say that they feel sad and negative at certain times during their chemotherapy. This is natural and usually only lasts a short time. However, if you continue to feel very low after your treatment is over you should let your medical team know. You may have depression which is very different to just feeling sad. Do not be afraid to let people know how you are feeling as there are things that can be done to help treat depression.

A personal experience

'My husband kept a daily diary to note down how he felt physically and mentally. It was very useful after each treatment to look back and say, 'Oh, I'd forgotten how I felt two days after the infusion – it was just the same this time.'

What happens after treatment finishes?

When you finish your course of chemotherapy, your doctor will let you know how your progress will be monitored. You will have your prostate specific antigen (PSA) levels measured regularly (usually every three months) and your doctor will ask you about any other symptoms you have. In most cases successful treatment of the cancer depends on lowering your PSA level, or an improvement in symptoms, such as reduced pain. If you have symptoms in between your check-ups it is important to tell your doctor or specialist nurse as soon as possible. In many situations they will be able to help reduce or control any symptoms you have.

National Institute for Health & Clinical Excellence (NICE)

www.nice.org.uk

Order line: 0845 003 7783

Email: publications@nice.org.uk

NICE produce guidelines on the use of docetaxel (Taxotere) for prostate cancer (quote ref. N1056).

UK Prostate Link

www.prostate-link.org.uk

UK Prostate Link helps you find and compare reliable information about all aspects of prostate cancer, including chemotherapy.

Questions to ask your doctor

- What is the aim of this treatment?
- Which drugs would be most suitable for me?
- How long will the treatment last? How many cycles will I need?
- What are the possible side effects of the drugs, and how long will they last?
- What happens if the chemotherapy drugs don't work? Are there other treatments I can have?
- Are there any clinical trials I can take part in?
- Are there any other treatment options available to me?
- Who should I contact if I have any questions at any point during my treatment? How do I contact them?
- Who will follow my care up after my treatment finishes?

The Prostate Cancer Charity makes every effort to make sure that its services provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate facts about prostate cancer. We hope that these will add to the medical advice you have had and will help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your doctor if you are worried about any medical issues.

The Prostate Cancer Charity funds research into the causes of, and treatments for, prostate cancer. We also provide support and information to anyone concerned about prostate cancer. We rely on charitable donations to continue this work. If you would like to make a donation, please call us on 020 8222 7666.

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* Calls are free of charge from UK landlines. Mobile phone charges may vary. Calls may be monitored for training purposes. Confidentiality is maintained between callers and The Prostate Cancer Charity.

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References to sources of information used in the production of this fact sheet are available on our website.

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