



UNIVERSITY HEALTHCARE  
REGIONAL CANCER CENTER

# **Chemotherapy and You**

# Class Overview

- What is Chemotherapy
- What is Immunotherapy
- What to expect during your chemotherapy treatment
- Side effects and how to manage them

# What is Chemotherapy?

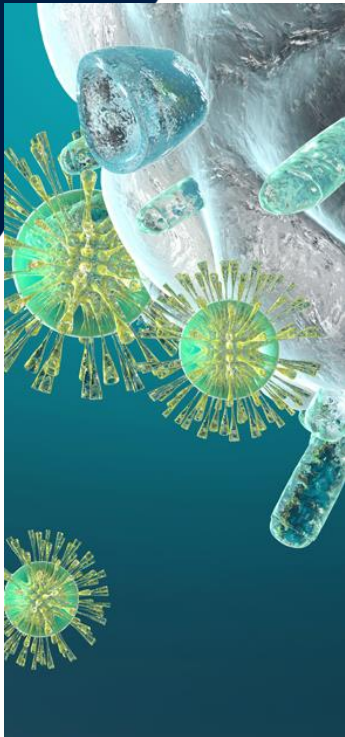
- Chemotherapy is a general term for drugs that destroy cancer cells or slow them from growing.
- You may receive one chemotherapy drug or a combination of different chemotherapy drugs.
- Chemotherapy can be given by mouth, directly into your vein or by injection under your skin.

# How Often is Chemotherapy given?

- Chemotherapy is often given in a series of cycles. Each cycle includes:
  - Treatment day(s)
  - Recovery Days after treatment
- Length of time on treatment days depends on the type of drugs you receive. Can range from 15 minutes to 6 hours.

# What is Immunotherapy?

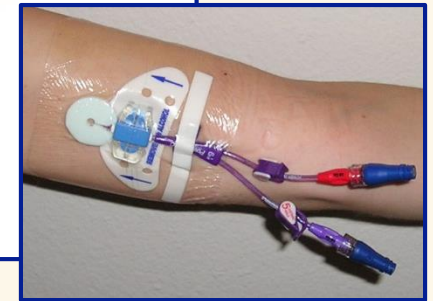
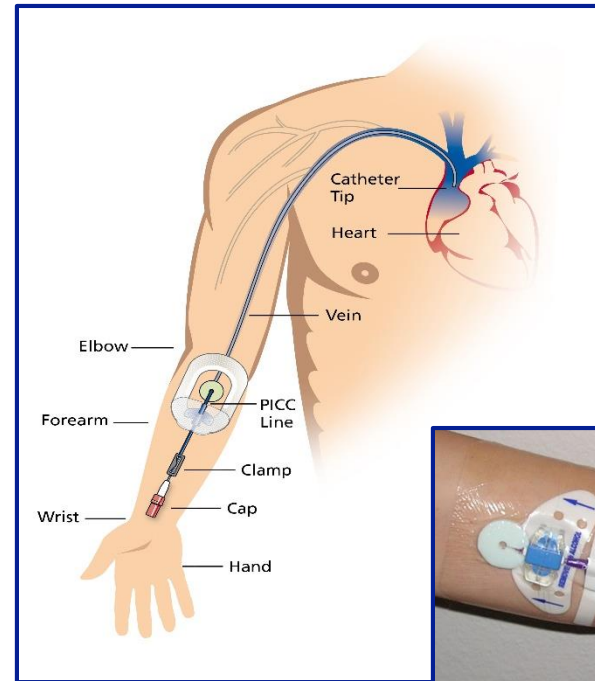
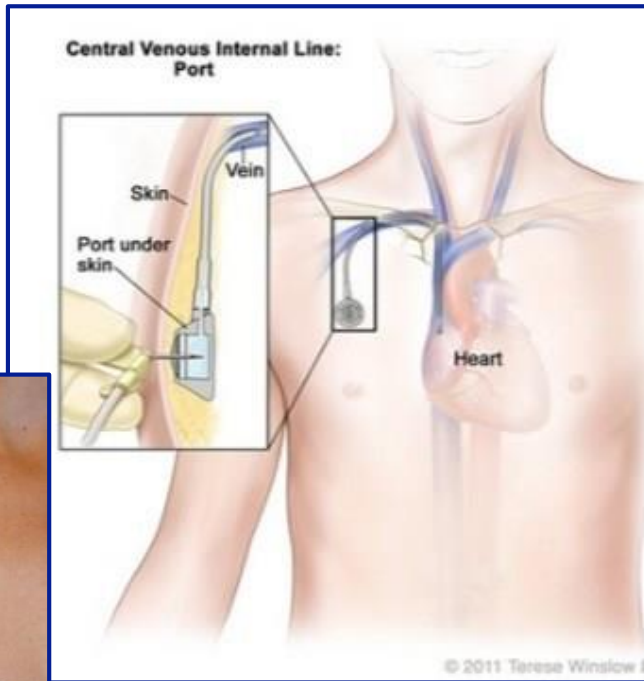
- Immunotherapy is a type of cancer treatment that helps your immune system fight cancer. The immune system helps your body fight infections and other diseases.
- Immunotherapy may be used alone or in combination with chemotherapy to treat your cancer.



# Venous Access Devices

- If you get chemotherapy by IV, a special long-term IV, called a Vascular Access Device may be inserted.
- The 2 most common special long-term IVs are:
  1. Peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC)
  2. Port-a-cath (PORT)

# Venous Access Devices



- ✓ Immediately report changes like unusual warmth, redness, swelling or tenderness around the site to your clinic nurse.

# What to Expect During Your Chemotherapy Treatment





# Cancer Center Appointments

- You will have two kinds of appointments related to your chemotherapy
  1. Clinic (Doctor) visits
    - 2-5 days prior to Chemotherapy when needed.
  2. Treatment visits



# Clinic Visit

During this visit you will be assessed by your Doctor

- ✓ This is the time to tell your team about how you have been doing and explain any side effects
- ✓ If you have any questions about prescriptions, ask now
- ✓ Write your questions down and bring them to this visit.

# Will I See a Doctor Before Every Treatment?

- Sometimes you won't need a clinic visit before your treatment.
- Your treatment nurse will discuss how you are feeling, review your bloodwork, and ask about side effects you are experiencing.
- Your nurse will notify the physician if there are any concerns.

# Bloodwork

- You will need to have blood drawn prior to each chemotherapy treatment.
- You should have your labs done the day before your treatment. Your Binder includes a list of WVU labs, so you can select one most convenient to you.



# What to Bring to Each Treatment Visit

- Your insurance card
- Your prescription insurance card
- Wear a shirt that allows easy access to your port (or arms if you have a PICC or peripheral IV)
- You may bring food and drinks
- Something to help pass the time
- List of current medication and allergies
- Any medications you take during the day.

# What Will Happen While Chemotherapy is Given

- Sit in a recliner chair
- Nurse will ask questions about your medical history, your distress level, and any current issues you are experiencing
- At your first treatment, you will get a prescription to pick up any additional medications you should take at home.
- Nurse will access your port or start and IV and give pre-medications to prevent side effects.
- Your treatment will typically start within 60 minutes of arriving to your chair.

# How Chemotherapy Works?

- Cancer cells divide more quickly than normal cells and chemotherapy drugs attack and kill cells that divide quickly.
- Chemo drugs can't tell the difference between healthy cells and cancer cells. This means normal cells are damaged along with the cancer cells, and this causes side effects.



# Common Side Effects

- Low Blood Counts
  - White blood cells (WBC)
  - Platelets
  - Red blood cells (RBC)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea and constipation
- Mouth sores
- Fatigue
- Hair loss

Your side effects will depend on the type of chemotherapy you receive, the dose you are given, and how your body reacts to chemotherapy



# Low Blood Counts

- White blood cells: help fight infection
- Platelets: Help form clots to stop bleeding
- Red blood cells: Carry oxygen to your tissues

# Low White Blood Cells (Neutropenia)

## Risk for Infection

- **When:** typically 7-14 days after chemotherapy

- ✓ Wash your hands often
- ✓ Avoid crowded areas or anyone who is ill
- ✓ Check your temperature once in the morning or if you are feeling unwell
- ✓ Be careful around animals
- ✓ Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold, and avoid undercooked foods.
- ✓ Wash fruits and vegetables well before eating them

# Know the Signs of Infection

- **A temperature of 100.4 or greater**
  - ✓ During normal business hours, please contact the office and speak directly with a nurse.
  - ✓ If you have a fever after business hours (evening, weekend, holiday) **go to the nearest emergency room**, even if you are feeling well.

# Know the Signs of Infection

- Call our office if you are experiencing:
  1. Loose bowel movements
  2. Chills/sweating
  3. Burning or frequent urination
  4. Severe cough, sore throat or mouth sores
  5. An open area that appears red or swollen

DO NOT wait until your next appointment to report these symptoms

# Low Platelet Count

## Risk of Bleeding

- **When:** 7-14 days after chemotherapy

- ✓ Use a soft tooth brush and electric razor
- ✓ Avoid activities that may cause injury
- ✓ Do not take the following without speaking to your cancer center team
  - Aspirin or Ibuprofen (like Advil, Motrin)
  - Any new medications (including herbal medications)
- ✓ Contact our office if you notice bruising or red spots on your skin
- ✓ **If you are actively bleeding, go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Low red blood cells (Anemia)

Low red blood cells can make you feel tired

- ✓ Get plenty of rest. Keep activity times short with rest periods in between
- ✓ Avoid heavy or strenuous work or exercise
- ✓ If you feel:
  - Dizzy
  - Short of breath
  - Headaches or ringing in your ears

**Call the office during normal business hours or contact the Oncologist on call.**

# Nausea and Vomiting

When: Usually in the evening after receiving treatment and for 2-3 days later.

- It is always better to try to prevent nausea than treat it!

- ✓ Take your anti-nausea medication as prescribed for the first 2-3 days unless you are told otherwise. You can cut back to “as needed” after 2-3 days if you are feeling well enough.
- ✓ Keep track of when it happens and tell your cancer care team at your next visit
- ✓ Food and fluid choices
- ✓ **If for more than 24 hours you:**
  - **Vomited several times**
  - **Can't keep food or fluids down**
  - **Are too nauseated to eat or drink**

**Call the office during normal business hours or contact the Oncologist on call.**

# Mouth Sores

Soreness, redness, white patches in mouth and on the tongue

- ✓ Brush your teeth after meals with a soft toothbrush
- ✓ Do not use mouthwashes that contain alcohol. Use alcohol-free mouth wash or a baking soda rinse (1/4 tsp baking soda, 1/8 tsp salt in 1 cup of warm water)
- ✓ If your mouth is sore, eat soft, bland foods
- ✓ **Tell your cancer center team if you have mouth sores or pain in your mouth.**



# Taste Changes

Food may taste metallic, or lack the usual taste

- This usually stops 3-4 weeks after the end of treatment

- ✓ Keep your mouth moist (sipping water throughout the day, sucking on ice chips if your nurse says you may have ice)
- ✓ Try sugar-free mint gum or citrus-flavored hard candies
- ✓ Use plastic utensils and glass cookware to lessen a metallic taste

# Diarrhea

Loose or watery stools 3 or more times a day

- ✓ Rest and drink plenty of fluid (water, sports drinks, clear liquids)
- ✓ Drink 8-12 cups of fluid slowly throughout the day
- ✓ If you have diarrhea, avoid natural laxatives
  - Prunes
  - Whole grains
  - Raw fruits and vegetables
- ✓ **If you have 4-6 (or more) loose bowel movements daily for more than 2 days, call the office during business hours or the Oncologist on call.**

# Constipation

Difficulty having a bowel movement

- Like nausea, it is best to attempt to prevent constipation

- ✓ Ask your nurse about stool softeners or laxatives if needed
- ✓ Stay active and drink lots of fluids (8-12 cups each day)
- ✓ Eat more high fiber foods
  - whole grains
  - fruits and vegetables
- ✓ **If you have not had a bowel movement for 3 or more days, call our office.**



# Hair Loss

Caused by some, but not all chemotherapy

- When: 2-3 weeks after treatment begins



- ✓ Try a short haircut before treatment starts
- ✓ If you plan to buy a wig, you can do so while you still have hair
- ✓ Use mild shampoo and be gentle with your hair
- ✓ Protect your head from the sun
- ✓ A list of local resources for wigs is included in your binder

# Skin and Nail Changes

Skin may become red, dry, itchy or flaky

Finger and toe nails may become darker, brittle or cracked

- On rare occasion, finger nails may become loose and fall off.

- ✓ Bathe in warm water (not hot)
- ✓ Use alcohol-free soaps, creams and lotions made for sensitive skin
- ✓ Stay out of direct sunlight and use sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or greater
- ✓ Tell your nurse if you notice any changes in your skin

# Fatigue

Feeling tired or a lack of energy that does not go away with sleep or rest

- ✓ **Listen to your body**
- ✓ Conserve your energy, Plan your important activities for times of day when you have the most energy
- ✓ Rest during the day, but leave long sleep for the night time
- ✓ Get mild exercise regularly, even if it is a short walk
- ✓ Do not skip meals/snacks and drink fluids
- ✓ Tell your nurse or doctor how fatigue is effecting you



# Sexual Side Effects

Physical and emotional changes during chemotherapy can cause sexual side effects

- Common side effects: loss of desire, painful intercourse, change in sexual function

- ✓ Talk with your doctor or nurse navigator about changes you are concerned with
- ✓ Be open and honest about your feelings with your spouse or partner
- ✓ **If you or your partner are able to become pregnant, you must use birth control.**
- ✓ Use condoms during sexual activity for 7 days after you receive chemotherapy
- ✓ Chemotherapy can cause changes in fertility. Discuss this with your doctor before starting treatment if it is a concern for you

# Questions?

