Western Connecticut Health Network
Danbury Hospital

Danbury Hospital Patient Education Sheet

Now that Your Chemotherapy has Finished

You've Finished Chemo!

It's been a long journey and you've finished your chemotherapy. It's not uncommon to have a mixture of emotions. Some are happy; others may include worry or fear about not seeing your medical team as frequently. Our goal is to help you understand what the next step in your treatment is and help you to recover from side effects of chemotherapy.

You may be finished with your cancer treatment or you may be going on to have surgery, radiation, and/or hormonal therapy. Your doctor or healthcare professional will explain what your treatment plan involves and your follow-up care.

Remember – no two people are alike - even when they have the same cancer and treatment, they may experience changes differently. Each person recovers from chemotherapy at their own individual pace. Side effects from chemotherapy vary from person to person depending on many factors. These include the type of chemotherapy you received, your general health prior to starting chemotherapy, and your age.

What should I do now?

1. **Celebrate!** – Completing chemotherapy is worth celebrating.
2. **Focus on your body** – Learn about good nutrition and exercise. These have been shown to improve cancer survival.
3. **Be Proactive** – Learn about identifying and managing side effects of treatment.
4. **Learn about what's next** – Be sure to understand what the next part of your plan is. Ask questions so you're ready and prepared to embark on the next part of your journey.
5. **Be Kind to Yourself** – You've been through a lot and it takes time to recover.

What is follow-up care?

- Follow-up care involves seeing your health care provider for regular checkups to evaluate side effects of treatment.
- That schedule of appointments depends on your type of cancer and your treatment - along with your overall health.
- At these visits, you will have a physical exam and testing such as blood work or imaging studies to check for signs if your cancer has returned or spread.
- Make sure to tell your health care provider of any changes in your health, family history, and any concerns.

When will my hair grow back?

Your hair will begin to grow back now that your chemotherapy treatment has been completed. Regrowth of hair varies for individuals but usually takes about 3-6 months. It may grow back a different color or texture than it was before. Do not color or perm your hair for at least 6 months in order to allow it to recover properly.

What kind of care is required if I have a Port-a-cath?

When your port-a-cath is not being used on a regular basis, it needs to be flushed every 4 weeks to keep the catheter open. Depending on your next follow up appointment, you may need to contact our office in order to schedule that appointment.

Sometimes, shortly after treatment is completed, the port-a-cath may be removed. Please talk to your doctor about this to understand when this

should occur. Our office staff will assist you in scheduling the removal of the port-a-cath.

How Long Do Side Effects of Chemotherapy Remain After Treatment?

Some side effects of chemotherapy may continue for a few months. These are called short term side effects. Side effects are all based on the type of chemotherapy you received. Some effects may last longer or be permanent.

Late side effects are those that come later well after your completion of therapy - months or years from the end of your treatment. These are very specific to the type of chemotherapy drug you had. Some include issues with the heart such as an irregular heartbeat or how the heart muscle pumps. There may also be an increased risk for osteoporosis, which is a weakening of the bones. Some drugs may have a very slight risk of causing a secondary cancer or problems with your bone marrow.

Your health care provider will review these with you based on your specific treatment. It's very important to be aware of these side effects so that you can report symptoms to your practitioner.

Common Side Effects

Fatigue

Fatigue is one of the most common side effects of chemotherapy and can linger for a while after treatment. Factors such as your individual state of health, other medical conditions and age can affect this. It is also dependent on the duration and types of treatment you received, such as radiation, surgery, and chemotherapy. For more information, see the handout on Fatigue.

Memory or Concentration Changes also called "Chemo brain"

About 25% of people may experience issues with loss of concentration and memory along with thinking problems. Other things that may impact this include: age, stress level, low blood counts, fatigue, anxiety, and the type of cancer drug you received. Symptoms may last for an extended period of time. For more information see the handout on Chemo Brain.

Nervous System Changes (Peripheral Neuropathy)

Peripheral neuropathy is a set of symptoms caused by damage to the nerves, usually in the fingers and toes. Other conditions such as diabetes, kidney disease, alcoholism and malnutrition may make this worse. For more information, see the handout on Peripheral Neuropathy.

Distress and Emotional Well-being

As you are finishing chemotherapy treatment, you may experience anxiety, sadness, and increased distress levels as you move into the next phase of survivorship and/or treatment. You may be anxious about ending treatment and not seeing your doctor or nurses as frequently as you do now.

Sometimes these feeling can be overwhelming and interfere with your quality of life.

What can I do?

Consider joining a support group, seek individual counseling or try complementary therapies (i.e. acupuncture, meditation, yoga). At times your practitioner may prescribe medication to help you feel better during this time.

We encourage you to read "Facing Forward – Life After Cancer Treatment" a book from The National Cancer Institute. There are other topics discussed in the "Facing Forward" book that are important for you to know.

Talk to your health care provider about any concerns or questions you may have.

Remember your Cancer Team is Here to Help You!