Weekly bolus 5-Fluorouracil (5FU) Chemotherapy

A Guide for Patients

This leaflet has been designed to help you and your family understand more about the chemotherapy that you are about to have as treatment for your cancer. If you need more information or have further questions, please do not hesitate to ask your hospital doctor or chemotherapy nurse.

What is cancer?
Our bodies are made up of tiny structures called cells that cannot be seen by the naked eye. Normally these cells reproduce themselves by dividing in a regular fashion. This allows growth and repair of body tissues. Sometimes uncontrolled growth of cells occurs. This is what happens in cancer.

What is Chemotherapy?
Chemotherapy means treatment with medicines called cytotoxic drugs that are given to get rid of or control cancer cells.

How do chemotherapy drugs work?
The drugs enter the bloodstream and go to all parts of your body. They destroy the cancer cells by interfering with their ability to grow and divide. The drugs can also affect normal cells that are growing and dividing. This may cause side effects but these are usually temporary because healthy cells can grow back to normal.

What can I do while having this treatment?
You can usually get on with life as normal. As long as you feel well enough you can carry on working and doing your favourite activities and hobbies. You should discuss this with the hospital doctor or your nurse caring for you. If it fits in around your treatments you can go on holiday in the UK, but please discuss any plans with your doctor or nurse before booking a holiday.

You can eat and drink as normal while on this treatment and alcohol is permitted in moderation. You may find that the taste of food and drinks may change. This will go back to normal once treatment is finished.

You will need to have blood tests taken at the start of each treatment to check that we are able to give you your chemotherapy. The practice nurse at your GP surgery can do this. Your nurse will discuss this with you at your first chemotherapy visit.

What is 5FU?
This is the name of chemotherapy drug that you are going to have.

- 5FU is for 5-Fluorouracil and is given once a week by a short injection into the vein.

This is one cycle of treatment.
The number of chemotherapy cycles given varies depends on your treatment plan. Your nurse and doctor will discuss this with you.

**Will I have any side effects?**

With most types of chemotherapy it is likely that you will have at least some side effects, although this varies considerably from patient to patient. **Please tell your chemotherapy nurse at your next visit about any side effects that you have had.** We will try to reduce them.

Below are some of the side effects, which you may have:

**Nausea (feeling sick) and Vomiting**
Some patients can have nausea and vomiting. There are very effective medicines for nausea/vomiting that we will give you in case you need them. If the sickness or nausea is not controlled or is reducing the amount you can drink, please contact your G.P. Please tell your nurse on your next visit if you have had problems with nausea or vomiting so that we can give you different anti-sickness medicines.

**Diarrhoea (loose or watery bowel movements)**
This chemotherapy often causes diarrhoea, but it is usually mild and controlled by the anti-diarrhoea medicine (loperamide) we will give you. However, if you open your bowels 4 or more times a day more than usual, or have abdominal cramping, or diarrhoea at night, please take loperamide, drink plenty of fluids and contact your G.P. or the hospital.

**Sore mouth**
Mouth ulcers can occur inside and outside the mouth (lips). We advise that you keep your mouth clean using a new, soft toothbrush. Your nurse will give you advice about mouthwashes that you can use if needed. Contact your G.P. for advice if your mouth becomes sore or ulcerated as you can be given treatment for this. If you have ulcers that stop you eating or drinking please contact the hospital.

**Soreness and Redness of Hands and Feet**
This is a temporary side effect that improves once the treatment is finished. We advise that you use a moisturising cream. Tell your nurse if you have it. If you find that your hands or feet become sore and interfere with your normal daily activities, contact your GP or the hospital.

**Skin changes.**
Sometimes your skin can become itchy and/or a rash may develop. Contact your G.P. for advice if needed and tell your nurse at your next visit.

**Increased risk of infection**
Following chemotherapy, your white blood cells can become low at any time after treatment. **If your temperature goes above 38°C (100.5°F) or if you suddenly feel unwell, even with a normal temperature contact your G.P. or NHS 24 straight away.**
Temporary hair thinning
You may notice an increased amount of hair in your hairbrush at times after treatment. It is unlikely that this will be enough to need a wig. However, if you feel that you need a wig at any time please speak with your nurse.

Chest Pain (Angina)
Very occasionally 5-Fluorouracil can cause chest pain. If you develop pain or tightness in your chest that may also spread to your neck, jaw or arm and you also feel sick or sweaty, call your GP or 999 immediately. Please tell the doctor that you have been on 5-Fluorouracil chemotherapy and ask them to contact the oncology registrar for advice.

Fertility
The drugs used in this chemotherapy regimen can affect your fertility. Women may find that their periods become irregular and may have an early menopause. If you wish to plan a family you should discuss this further with your consultant before starting chemotherapy.

It is possible to have a normal sex life during treatment, however some people may find that their interest decreases. It is very important that you use barrier contraception to avoid pregnancy. Please refer to the specific patient information leaflet about this.

Fatigue
It is very common for people on chemotherapy to feel excessively tired at times. This tiredness (or fatigue) may get worse as you go through treatment. There are things that can be done to make things better so if you feel more tired than usual, please talk to your doctor or nurse. They can give you advice about coping with it.

Interactions with other medicines
Please tell you doctor if you are taking any of the following medicines as they can interact with your chemotherapy:
Allopurinol, Folic acid (a vitamin that can be in multivitamin tablets).

We hope that this information has helped you understand more about your chemotherapy. This leaflet is designed to be used along with discussion with your doctor and nurse. It is not intended to be the only information on this topic that you are given.

Contact Numbers:
For symptom advice: Ward 1 (Mon-Fri 8.30 am – 6pm)
0131 537____

For queries about appointments, booking transport, or phoning in your weight:
Ward 1 (Mon-Fri 8.30 am –6pm)
0131 537 1878
Out of Hours Emergency Advice:
Phone NHS 24 on 08454 242424. Remember to tell them you are receiving chemotherapy.

If your GP needs further advice, the oncology registrar on call can be contacted by phoning the Western General Hospital switchboard on 0131 537 1000.

Other phone numbers specific to your care:

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