



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

What is chemotherapy?

A guide for young people

This leaflet explains what chemotherapy is to help you understand what will happen to you when you come into hospital.

What is chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy is a powerful medicine for cancer. 'Chemo' means chemical and 'therapy' means treatment – people often just call it chemo for short. The chemo is put into your Hickman line (wiggly) or portacath and it flows all round your body. It can also be given to you as a tablet or medicine to take by mouth or as an injection into your leg.



How does chemo work?

The chemo that you are getting kills the cancer cells. Chemo does not just kill cancer cells, but as a side-effect can also kill some healthy cells. This means that you may feel sick, get a sore mouth, lose your hair and feel really tired.

It can also mean your body does not make all the blood cells it needs. If this happens you may need blood and platelet transfusions. This is done as a day case on the ward and you can go home once the transfusion is complete.

You may also be at more risk of infection because you do not have enough white blood cells (neutropenia). If you get a temperature you will have to be admitted to hospital. We will give you intravenous antibiotics for at least 48 hours through your hickman or portacath.

These effects won't last after you stop having chemo and your hair will grow back!

You can have a wig made of real hair until your own grows back.

Hair colour

Did you know? If you lose your hair after having chemotherapy it might grow back a different colour!



Further concerns and questions

If you are worried about anything to do with your chemo, talk to your nurse or doctor – they will be happy to help you.

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

London Road

Reading RG1 5AN

0118 322 5111

www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Authors: Dr Asha Madasseri & Kellie Oakley CNS Paediatric Oncology

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