



Understanding chemotherapy

MARCELLE RUTH
CANCER CENTRE & SPECIALIST HOSPITAL

**The Marcelle Ruth Cancer Centre
& Specialist Hospital is the first
comprehensive healthcare centre of its
kind in Nigeria and indeed West Africa.**

> Our promise

In everything we do, we believe that compassion and care make all the difference.

With vast experience and understanding, our specialist team uses the very latest technology and treatments to deliver the best outcomes possible.

From screening and diagnosis to treatment and ongoing support, we are committed to providing outstanding care to those in need.

About this booklet

We understand it can be overwhelming for anyone to undergo cancer care, but we are here to provide you with help and support.

The focus of this leaflet is to help you and your family understand more about chemotherapy.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is the drug treatment of cancer using cytotoxic (anti-cancer) medicines.

How is chemotherapy given?

Cytotoxic medicines usually need to enter the blood stream to reach all areas of the body to get to any cancer cells present.

Before you start chemotherapy

You may have baseline blood tests to make sure your kidneys and liver are working well.

Your lung function and heart may also need to be checked depending on the type of medicines.

These tests may be repeated during your treatment to ensure these organs are still working well.

Methods of chemotherapy administration

To get directly into the bloodstream, most cytotoxic medicines are given by injection into a vein (intravenous).

Some cytotoxic medicines can be given as tablets or liquid by mouth.

How long is a course of chemotherapy treatment?

Chemotherapy is usually given in cycles. A cycle is a spell of treatment followed by a rest from treatment.

For example, you may have a dose of cytotoxic medicine on one day or a few days then you may have a rest from treatment for 2–4 weeks. Cycles depend on the type of medicines used.

A full course of treatment is usually about six (6) months. However, the course may vary and be shorter or longer.

You may have scans or X-rays at various times during treatment to see how well the medicine is working.

Where is Chemotherapy given?

Chemotherapy is generally given as an outpatient. Depending on the medicine, you could spend a few hours for each dose. Some medicines may require an overnight stay in the hospital

Side effects

Cytotoxic medicines are toxic and can cause unwanted side effects. Some of these will be discussed by your doctor or nurse before you start treatment. Below are a list of some common side effects:

Nausea and Vomiting

It is common to feel sick during and after each cycle. Part of your treatment includes anti-nausea medicines which will be given before the cytotoxic medicine is infused or swallowed.

We advise that you should avoid spicy or fried foods during treatment.

Drink plenty of fluids.

Dry snacks like toast or crackers also help.

Fatigue

Another common side effect. You need to take regular naps/rest and reduce your normal activities. You may need to get someone to help you with your daily chores.

Mucositis

Some cytotoxic medicines may affect the lining of the mouth. It is important to maintain good oral hygiene.

- Use a soft toothbrush and brush your teeth twice a day.
- Use alcohol-free mouthwash.
- Rinse your mouth after meals.

Avoid keeping your mouth dry by taking frequent sips of water and/or chewing sugar-free gum.

Hair loss

Some cytotoxic medicines damage the hair follicle and cause your hair to fall out. Body hair and eyelashes may also fall out. We encourage you to cut your hair short before treatment.

For women we recommend wearing a wig/hat or scarf if having no hair is bothersome.

Diarrhoea

Anti-diarrhoeal medicines may be needed. You should drink more water and if needed you may be admitted for intravenous fluids if you become dehydrated.

Constipation

Eat a lot of food high in fibre, and drink a lot of water too. If necessary, a laxative may be prescribed.

Other side effects may be associated with some specific drugs.

At Marcelle Ruth, our dedicated and skilled doctors and nurses are available to guide you through your chemotherapy journey.

Marcelle Ruth

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