

# Chemotherapy

**Chemotherapy, also called “chemo,” is treatment with drugs that block or slow down cell growth, most often for cancer. There are many chemotherapy drugs, and often several are given together.**

Depending on the type of cancer, its size, and whether it has spread, chemotherapy may cure the cancer, slow or prevent its spread, or make its symptoms better. Chemotherapy is often used with other cancer treatments, such as radiation or surgery. For instance, a patient may be given chemotherapy to shrink a tumor before surgery or radiation or to help kill any cancer cells that may be left afterward. Chemotherapy is sometimes administered with other nonchemotherapy agents such as antibodies that also block or slow down tumor growth.

## How Chemotherapy Is Given

Chemotherapy is administered

- Most commonly, by infusion into a vein or artery
- Directly into an area of the body, such as the spine or abdomen
- As an injection into the arm, leg, or other area
- By mouth as a pill or liquid
- Into the skin as a cream

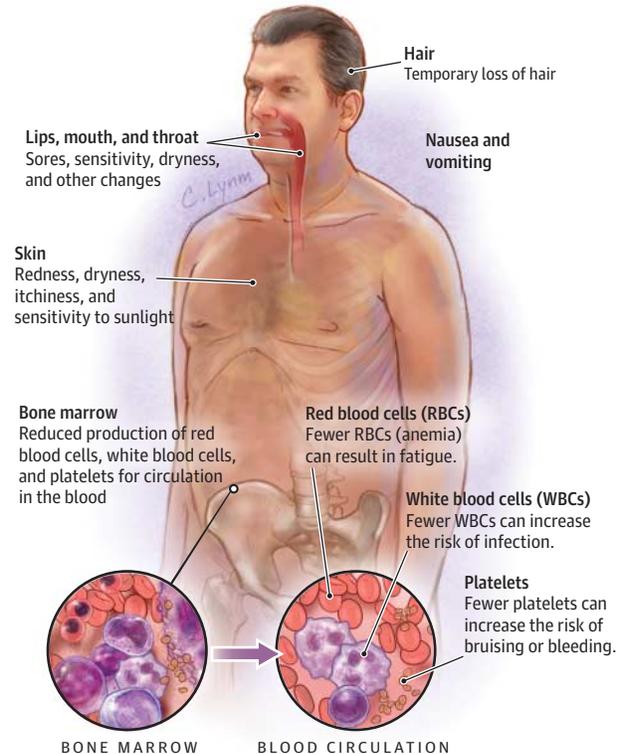
Sometimes people are admitted to the hospital for chemotherapy, but most receive it at home, at a hospital, or at a clinic. You might receive chemotherapy daily, weekly, biweekly, or monthly depending on the type of cancer, whether it has spread, and how your body responds to the treatment. Time between treatment cycles allows the body to rest.

## Side Effects

Chemotherapy drugs are strong medicines that work to kill cancer cells. However, they kill healthy cells as well. As a result, people undergoing chemotherapy often have side effects, which can be uncomfortable.

- Nausea and vomiting are among the most common side effects.
- Hair loss—although many people lose their hair, it usually grows back. Women may choose to wear wigs or scarves.
- Mouth and skin changes—chemotherapy affects cells that divide quickly, including healthy mouth and throat cells, so you may develop mouth or throat sores or skin problems such as dryness or redness.
- Fatigue—it is common for chemotherapy to make you feel tired and lacking in energy.
- Fewer red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets—chemotherapy affects the bone marrow and therefore the blood cells. In addition to tiredness from fewer red blood cells, fewer white cells make it harder to fight infections, and fewer platelets can mean you bleed more easily. Talk to your doctor about any questions or concerns you have about chemotherapy.

Common side effects of chemotherapy treatment



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Cancer Institute  
[www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/chemotherapy-and-you](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/chemotherapy-and-you)
- American Cancer Society  
[www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/treatmenttypes/chemotherapy/index](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/treatmenttypes/chemotherapy/index)

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