

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is the name of the group of drugs used to kill cancer cells by preventing them from dividing and growing. These are also known as cytotoxic drugs. Because cytotoxic drugs work by destroying all rapidly dividing cells, some normal cells are also affected, but normal cells are able to recover more quickly.

Chemotherapy can be given by mouth, into a vein or into a muscle. Often intravenous chemotherapy is given via a central line. Chemotherapy is normally administered in cycles. The break in between cycles allows normal cells time to recover.

Side effects of specific drugs vary; see 'Common chemotherapy drugs' in the **GREEN** section.

There are some side effects common to most chemotherapy drugs. Other rapidly dividing cells in the body include:

- **Hair**
Damage to hair follicles results in hair loss (alopecia). Hair usually starts to fall out a few weeks after starting treatment but will re-grow again once chemotherapy treatment has finished.
- **Bone marrow**
Cytotoxic drugs temporarily stop the production of blood cells. The three main cells affected are:
 - White blood cells: fight infections
 - Red blood cells: carry oxygen
 - Platelets: help blood to clot
- **The cells in the lining of the mouth and gut**
This can lead to symptoms including diarrhoea, vomiting and a sore mouth.

You will be informed which chemotherapy drugs your child will receive and what short and long-term side effects are commonly associated with those drugs.