Caring at its best

University Hospitals of Leicester

# What to expect after your chemotherapy has finished

# **Cancer Services**

Information for patients

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## **Finishing chemotherapy**

This leaflet is about the issues that you may face after your chemotherapy treatment ends.

This includes looking at the side effects that you may worry about, suggesting ways of coping with them and pointing you in the right direction if you feel that you need some extra support or advice. Details of useful resources are included throughout this leaflet.

If you feel it is useful, make a note of what treatment you have received in the space below:

#### Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk



## Who to contact for information or support

Your key worker: if you are not sure who your key worker is, please ask your chemotherapy nurse.

My key worker is: .....

Contact: .....

Your GP will be involved in your cancer journey, and will be a source of advice and information for you.

#### Macmillan Information and Support Centre

Advice and information for all those affected by cancer.

Tel: 0116 258 6189 Website: www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/cancerinfo

#### **Coping with Cancer**

Practical and emotional support for anyone affected by cancer.

Tel: 0116 223 0055 Website: www.c-w-c.org.uk

#### Macmillan Cancer Support

As well as the information available on their website, Macmillan produces a range of booklets for those who have finished their treatment, including:

- What to do after cancer treatment ends: 10 top tips
- Managing the late effects of bowel cancer treatment
- Managing the late effects of breast cancer treatment
- Managing the late effects of head and neck cancer treatment
- Bone health
- Your feelings after cancer treatment

These can be obtained free of charge from Macmillan Cancer Support: 0808 808 00 00

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

#### Age UK Macmillan Project

Offers support to anyone over the age of 50 who has been affected by cancer.

Tel: 0116 223 7370 or 0116 204 6440

## **Reduced immunity**

#### You are still at risk of infection

Call the Chemotherapy Suite if you are unwell or have a high temperature after your last treatment. Your blood counts should start to return to normal limits over the four to six weeks after finishing your chemotherapy.

#### The Chemotherapy Emergency Number is 0808 178 2212

## Feelings and emotions

There is no right or wrong way to feel when you finish chemotherapy. Feelings vary from person to person, as we are all different and cope in different ways. These feelings can also change as time goes by.

You may be relieved that your chemotherapy has finished. Or you may feel isolated or insecure because you are seeing much less of the doctors or nurses looking after you.

Your experience of cancer and its treatments may strengthen your relationships with those close to you. However, having cancer is stressful and may have a negative affect on your relationships.

You may wish to contact the following organisations:

## Let's Talk Wellbeing

Psychological assessment and treatment for what are known as mild to moderate common mental health problems.

Leicester City: 0116 292 7010

Leicestershire County and Rutland: 01509 561 100

Coping with Cancer - provides practical and emotional support for anyone affected by cancer.

Tel: 0116 223 0055

Website: www.c-w-c.org.uk

**Relate** - provides services for couples and families as well as relationship counselling and sex therapy.

Tel: 0116 254 3011

Website: www.relateleicestershire.org.uk

Broadly speaking, what three things would make your life healthier and better now and for the future?

# Tiredness (fatigue)

Tiredness builds up gradually whilst having chemotherapy.

Treatment such as surgery and radiotherapy also cause tiredness. Some people return to their usual energy levels quite quickly. However, tiredness can last for six months to a year, and in some cases even longer. Poor concentration due to tiredness is common and this can sometimes affect your memory.

## Things that may help fatigue

Allow for rest times during your day. Plan activities for times in the day when you feel less tired. Gentle exercise, like walking, can help improve your stamina. Have a regular night-time routine.

You will slowly begin to notice you have more energy and your level of activity will increase as this happens.

Keep a diary of your activities so improvements and progress can be seen.

Macmillan Cancer Support produces a booklet called "Coping with fatigue". This can be ordered by contacting Macmillan on 0808 808 00 00.

# Pins and needles (peripheral neuropathy)

Some chemotherapy drugs cause altered sensations such as tingling and numbness in your fingers and toes.

This often gets worse before it gets better, and can take as long as six months to a year to settle down.

If the numbness and tingling are still present a year after treatment, it will probably not go away completely.

Excessive heat or cold will make it feel worse. It can, in very rare circumstances, cause problems with mobility and movement.

# Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema usually affects an arm or leg but can affect other parts of the body. It is swelling that can develop if lymph nodes have been removed due to surgery, or damaged by radiotherapy.

## Preventing lymphoedema

- Where gloves to protect your hands when gardening or doing DIY
- Avoid getting scratched by pets
- Avoid sun damage to your skin
- Clean any cuts immediately to avoid the risk of infection
- Do not allow anyone to insert a needle, take blood, or monitor your blood pressure on your infected limb.
- Seek medical advice if you are concerned that you may have a problem

## Lymphoedema (continued)

#### Signs of lymphoedema

- Swelling
- Heaviness of the limb
- Dry, itchy skin
- Stiffness and limited movement
- Discomfort
- Redness and rash

### Treatment of lymphoedema

Specialist care is available from lymphoedema specialist nurses. You will need to be referred by your GP, consultant or nurse specialist.

Macmillan Cancer Support produces a booklet called "Understanding lymphoedema". This can be ordered by contacting Macmillan on 0808 808 00 00.

## Hair loss

If you have lost your hair due to chemotherapy, you will notice it starting to grow back about four to six weeks after finishing chemotherapy. It may be different texture, colour or come back curly even though it was straight before treatment. After twelve to sixteen weeks you should have a good covering of fine hair. Wear your wig or headwear until you feel comfortable to show off your new style.

Wait at least four to five months before colouring your hair. Always do a patch test prior to applying the dye as your scalp may be sensitive. Use a dye that is semi-permanent and vegetable-based for the first few times.

The **Hair Loss Service** is based in the Macmillan Information Centre at the Leicester Royal Infirmary and can be contacted on: 0116 258 6189.

## Getting back to normal

You may be able to go back work quite soon after finishing your chemotherapy treatment. However, you may not be able to go back to work for some time because of the effects of cancer and its treatment.

If you need advice on benefits or going back to work, please contact:

## CAB Macmillan Helpline

A free benefits advice service for those affected by cancer in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

Tel: 0300 456 8400

If you are at school, college or university please ask your key worker about the support that can be offered, or contact the Information Centre on 0116 258 6189.

Your key worker might have mentioned the **HOPE** (Help Overcoming Problems Effectively) programme to you. This programme is aimed at helping people become more knowledgeable, skilled and confident in managing the physical, emotional and psychological consequences of living with cancer. Contact the Macmillan Information and Support Centre for more details.

Tel: 0116 258 6189

## Follow-up care

Before completing your chemotherapy your consultant will explain the follow-up care you will require. This will vary from person to person, depending on the type of cancer you have.

Make a note of your appointments:

Previous reference: CAN 287

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسـی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہِ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔ علی هذه المعلومات بلغة أخری، الرجاء الاتصال علی رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ `ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ। Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Leicester's Hospitals is a research active trust so you may find research happening on your ward or in your clinic. To find out about the benefits of research and become involved yourself, speak to your clinician or nurse, call 0116 258 8351 or visit www.leicestersresearch.nhs.uk/ patient-and-public-involvement

