

# After Chemotherapy



AlfredHealth



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HEALTH

*Southern Health*

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Note: SMICS cannot guarantee the accuracy, completeness or timeliness of the information provided by organisations or authors.

## After Chemotherapy

- \* Cancer creates uncertainty in all areas of your life. Completing treatment may result in a range of emotions and raise new questions
- \* As you are an individual you will have different responses to your diagnosis and treatment, and the time it takes you to adjust and recuperate will vary
- \* There are many different types of chemotherapy treatments all with differing side effects. Talk to your oncologist if you have any questions about the treatment you received
- \* The aim of this booklet is to provide you with practical information and strategies to refer to after chemotherapy treatment and further resources to access if required

### ACCESSING INFORMATION

When you read health information from the internet, it is always important to ask the following questions:

- \* Who wrote the information and what are their qualifications?
- \* Where did the information come from?
- \* When was it written?

The answers to these questions will help you decide if the information you are reading is reliable and up-to-date.

## Medical assistance

Your GP is the first point of contact. Take the details of your medical specialist and treatment to your GP, to enable them to contact these people or refer on if required.

- ✦ Immediately after treatment and for up to four (4) weeks contact your emergency department for urgent matters, such as:
  - Fever over 38°C
  - Chills or sweats
  - Severe vomiting
  - Chest pain or shortness of breath
  - Bruising easily or any abnormal bleeding
  - Pain or burning when urinating

## Follow up

Your oncologist will want to see you after completing chemotherapy for a series of follow up appointments.

- ✦ Ensure that you know when your follow up appointments are, what tests you need to have, and what you need to bring with you before the appointment if required
- ✦ Ensure your GP details are up to date, and that copies of your results are sent to your GP
- ✦ If there is a waiting time to see your oncologist and you are concerned make an appointment to see your GP

## Infection

After treatment, for most people the immune system may not be functioning as well as it normally would, so you may be at higher risk of infection.

- ✦ Your immune system may be compromised for 7-10 days after treatment
- ✦ Continue to monitor your temperature for 6-8 weeks (the first sign of infection is a temperature of 38°C and above)
- ✦ Flu vaccinations are recommended and your GP can provide this
- ✦ If you are feeling unwell go to your GP or the nearest emergency department if out of business hours



## Mouth Care

It is important to continue to care for your mouth after chemotherapy, to attempt to avoid soreness, ulceration, infection, dry mouth and bleeding gums.

- ✱ Maintain your oral hygiene routine by cleaning your teeth or dentures after each meal
- ✱ Rinse your mouth with salt water or mouth wash (Difflam or similar) for 4 weeks
- ✱ Avoid alcohol based products as they can dry your mouth
- ✱ Your sensation of taste can be altered as a result of your treatment, this will return in time, but will vary between individuals
- ✱ To assist in keeping your mouth moist use 'Biotene' or similar products
- ✱ Eating pineapple may be useful in alleviating dry mouth and nausea
- ✱ Visit your dentist regularly for check ups and general maintenance
- ✱ Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated



## Diet

Aim to maintain a healthy body weight and adapt a long term healthy lifestyle. Eat a healthy diet with variety and everything in moderation.

- ✱ Aim to maintain a healthy body weight by eating a variety of foods daily and in moderate amounts
- ✱ For dietary advice speak to your GP to arrange a referral to a dietitian

## RESOURCES

Health*Insite* provides links to reputable resources for dietary advice for people who have been diagnosed with cancer

- ✱ Health*Insite* [http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/diet\\_and\\_cancer](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/diet_and_cancer)

The Cancer Council provides a guide about food groups and portion sizes

- ✱ Cancer Council Victoria Ph: 13 11 20
- ✱ Cancer Council Victoria <http://www.cancervic.org.au/healthy-diet>

The NH&MRC and Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) dietary guidelines recommend the groups of foods and lifestyle patterns that promote good nutrition and health.

- ✱ NHMRC Dietary guidelines <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/dietsyn.htm>
- ✱ Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) [www.daa.asn.com](http://www.daa.asn.com)

*Go For Your Life* has articles containing the latest information about antioxidants, carbohydrates, the benefits of eating fruits & vegetables and more <http://www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au>

*Cooking with foods that fight cancer* book Richard Beliveau and Denis Gingras – lots of recipes and meal ideas

## Bowel habits

You may notice a change in your bowel habits during and after chemotherapy treatment: going to the toilet more frequently, constipation, diarrhoea and/or change in stool consistency.

- ✱ Ensure that you continue to take your prescribed bowel medication
- ✱ Seek advice from your GP for any cramping, bloating, bleeding, diarrhoea and ongoing pain
- ✱ Drink plenty of fluids each day (~2 litres). Suitable fluids are: water, clear soup, weak cordial, diluted fruit juice, diluted soft drinks
- ✱ If you have diarrhoea avoid nuts, seeds, pips and skin from fruit and vegetables
- ✱ If you have constipation include wholegrain breads and cereals and at least 5 serves of fruit and/or vegetables in your daily food intake

## Exercise

- ✱ Start exercising again slowly, don't push yourself too hard
- ✱ Return to your pre-treatment exercise level as tolerated
- ✱ Both rest and activity are necessary, find the right balance for you, start small such as walking around the garden
- ✱ If you prefer, see a personal trainer or visit a gym and talk to the trainers for advice

### RESOURCES

- ✱ Go For your Life has articles on the benefits of being active and an articles specifically for cancer "exercise to help you cope". <http://www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au>
- ✱ Cancer Council Victoria booklet – Nutrition and Exercise, For people with cancer their family and friends. Ph: 13 11 20

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## Fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of tiredness all the time and losing interest in the things you normally like to do. This is a very common side effect from cancer treatment.

- ✱ Some of the following strategies may be useful for you in coping with fatigue:
  - Keep a diary to monitor fatigue
  - Aim to keep up some regular physical activity
  - Eat a healthy well-balanced diet
  - Consider options for reducing stress

- ✱ Give yourself time to recover for as long as it takes
- ✱ Talk to your GP for strategies on how to manage fatigue

### RESOURCES

- ✱ Cancer Council Victoria booklet - Coping with fatigue caused by cancer treatments Ph: 13 11 20

## Hair loss and regrowth

Your hair may begin to grow back while you're still having treatment or it might take 6-12 months after treatment is over to begin growing back.

- ✦ When hair is growing back it may look different but it usually returns to normal in time
- ✦ You will be able to colour your hair, however products low in ammonia or ammonia free need to be used so speak to your hairdresser for advice on the products they use
- ✦ Use natural moisturising mild products when washing your hair eg. baby shampoo and Aloe Vera based products



## Body image and sexuality

Having cancer can change your usual sexual practice, desire and the way you feel and view yourself.

- ✦ Ask how the cancer treatment you received may affect you sexually and your fertility
- ✦ Express your feelings with loved ones
- ✦ Ask your GP if you want to discuss these issues and/or ask for a referral to a sexual counsellor or therapist
- ✦ For women, menopause may be associated with treatment. See your GP for advice

## RESOURCES

- ✦ "Look good feel better" workshops are available for men and women to assist in managing your appearance related to hair loss <http://www.lgfb.org.au>
- ✦ Cancer Council Victoria Booklet - Sexuality and Cancer, For people with cancer, their family and friends  
Ph: 13 11 20
- ✦ BreaCan can provide support for breast cancer patients who require prosthetics –  
Ph: 1300 781 500
- ✦ Mens Line Australia, specialist professional counsellors 24 hours, 7 days  
Ph: 1300 78 99 78

## Mood changes, anxiety and depression

When you complete chemotherapy you may expect that your life will be 'back to normal'. You may be surprised then to experience mood changes or feelings of anxiety and depression. These feelings are normal as your life has been turned upside down. Now your treatment has been completed you will not have the same level of support from your medical team. You may fear that cancer will return and your family and friends may expect you to be just as you were before your diagnosis or may still treat you as though you are still sick.

Your life will probably never be the same again. Your experience may have brought about both positive and negative changes in your life; e.g. appreciate how precious life is but also how hard it can be.

- ✱ If you are concerned, visit your GP for a referral – there is a Medicare rebate available for seeing a psychologist and social worker
- ✱ Ensure that you investigate all options and persist in gaining help
- ✱ Contact the Cancer Council Victoria Ph: 13 11 20 for assistance in linking into:
  - Chat groups
  - Online forum
  - DVDs
  - Booklets
- ✱ Some of the following suggestions may be useful for you:
  - Keep a diary of your mood to reflect your progress
  - Talk to family and friends about how you are feeling
  - Pamper yourself, do things you enjoy
  - Ease back into your lifestyle, be kind to yourself

## RESOURCES

- ✱ Cancer Council Victoria – Cancer – how are you travelling? Understanding the emotional and social impact of cancer Ph: 13 11 20
- ✱ Cancer Council Victoria – Learning to relax: for people with cancer, family and friends Ph: 13 11 20
- ✱ Cancer Council Victoria – Emotions and Cancer: A guide for people with cancer, their family and friends Ph: 13 11 20
- ✱ Beyond Blue <http://www.beyondblue.org.au>
- ✱ Black Dog Institute <http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au>
- ✱ Mens Line Australia, specialist professional counsellors 24 hours, 7 days Ph: 1300 78 99 78

# Complementary Therapies

Complementary therapies are used in conjunction with conventional treatments and are increasingly considered an important part of supportive care, which helps people address a wide range of challenges beyond medical treatment for cancer. Note that complementary medicines do not require a prescription for use, and are readily available for self-medication from supermarkets, pharmacies and health food stores. In Australia, complementary medicines are not subject to the standards and guidelines of the Codex Alimentarius commission. (ie. Codex is the internationally recognised body that sets food standards, codes of practice, food production and food safety guidelines with the aim of protecting consumer health and retail traders).

- ✦ Examples of complementary therapies include:
  - Acupuncture
  - Aromatherapy
  - Counselling
  - Herbal medicine & flower remedies
  - Massage / therapeutic touch
  - Meditation
  - Music therapy
  - Nutrition
  - Reflexology

- ✦ Complementary therapies can be beneficial. However, the therapeutic quality of many botanical and herbal medicines has not been proven. You should weigh up the pros and cons of using these therapies which can become costly, and discuss your decision with your GP, to minimise the risk of any problems.

## RESOURCES

- ✦ Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre has information on Herbal remedies. The Integrative Medicine Service, provides evidence-based information about herbs, botanicals, supplements, and more. <http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11570.cfm>
- ✦ Cancer Council – Understanding complementary therapies, A guide for people with cancer, their families and friends Ph: 13 11 20
- ✦ Cancer Council Victoria – Complementary and alternative cancer therapies for people with cancer, their family and friends. Ph 13 11 20
- ✦ National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (US) [www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)
- ✦ Complementary and Alternative Medicine, National Cancer Institute (NCI) <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/treatment/cam>
- ✦ National Institute of Health (NIH), Office of Dietary Supplements, International bibliographic Information on Dietary Supplements (IBIDS) Database [http://ods.od.nih.gov/Health\\_Information/IBIDS.aspx](http://ods.od.nih.gov/Health_Information/IBIDS.aspx)



## Practical support and lifestyle

- ✱ Contact the social worker at your hospital or Centrelink for information about transport costs to medical appointments, and prescription medicines
- ✱ Home nursing care, which is available through district nursing, or through the local palliative care service – your doctor or hospital can arrange this
- ✱ Meals on wheels, home care services, and aids and appliances, which can make life easier – contact your GP, occupational therapist or physiotherapist, or your local council.

### RESOURCES

- ✱ Cover more travel insurance <http://covermore.com.au>
- ✱ Centrelink Australian Government <http://www.centrelink.gov.au>

## Late effects

A late effect of treatment is one that may occur more than five years after your diagnosis of cancer.

- ✱ All treatments for cancer have the potential for producing late effects
- ✱ The occurrence of late effects differs from person to person
- ✱ Late effects can range from things like learning, memory and attention difficulties, dental and vision problems and heart problems
- ✱ Talk to your GP if you are concerned about late effects of treatment

## Carers

Your carers such as family and friends may need assistance and support at this time; you can refer them to the resources listed.

### RESOURCES

- ✱ Carers Australia provide important services like counselling, advice, advocacy, education and training <http://www.carersaustralia.com.au>
- ✱ The carers advice line provides information and support for people caring for people with illness and disability Ph: 1800 242 636
- ✱ Centrelink Australian Government for financial assistance <http://www.centrelink.gov.au>
- ✱ Cancer Council Helpline for patients and their carers, friends and relatives Ph: 13 11 20
- ✱ Lifeline a confidential telephone counselling and referral service, operating 24 hours 7 days a week Ph: 13 11 14
- ✱ CanTeen for young people 12-24 living with cancer <http://www.canteen.org.au>

### RESOURCES

- ✱ Cancer Net  
Oncologist approved cancer information from the American Society of Clinical Oncology <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Survivorship/Late+Effects#>
- ✱ Cancer Institute of NSW provides information on treatment and side effects – eviQ [www.eviq.org.au](http://www.eviq.org.au)

## More information

Seek information from your local library/ librarian if you do not have access to a computer at home.

- ✱ Cancer Council Victoria  
[www.cancervic.org.au](http://www.cancervic.org.au) Ph: 13 11 20
  - CCV – Life after cancer, When Cancer won't go away, and Life with Cancer
  - Cancer Services directory
  - Other booklets
  - DVDs
  - Cancer Helpline Ph: 13 11 20
  - Other support (online, telephone, support groups)
  - Tumour stream specific booklets and information sheets

- ✱ Cancer Voices Victoria  
[www.cancervoices.org.au](http://www.cancervoices.org.au)
  - advocacy workshops
- ✱ Cancerbackup  
[www.cancerbackup.org.au](http://www.cancerbackup.org.au)
- ✱ Palliative Care [www.pallcarevic.asn.au](http://www.pallcarevic.asn.au)
- ✱ National Cancer Institute  
[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)
- ✱ Cancer Institute of NSW eviQ  
[www.eviq.org.au](http://www.eviq.org.au)
- ✱ Royal Marsden  
[www.royalmarsden.org](http://www.royalmarsden.org)
- ✱ Virtual Cancer Centre  
[www.virtualcancercentre.com](http://www.virtualcancercentre.com)
- ✱ OncoLink [www.oncolink.com](http://www.oncolink.com)
- ✱ Cancer Source  
[www.cancersource.com](http://www.cancersource.com)
- ✱ Cancer Care [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)
- ✱ Cancer Symptoms  
[www.cancersymptoms.org](http://www.cancersymptoms.org)
- ✱ Better Cancer Care  
[www.bettercancercare.com](http://www.bettercancercare.com)
- ✱ Beyond Blue  
<http://www.beyondblue.org.au>
- ✱ Mens Line Australia, specialist professional counsellors 24 hours, 7 days Ph: 1300 78 99 78
- ✱ Centrelink Australian Government  
<http://www.centrelink.gov.au>



- ✱ American Cancer Society  
Comprehensive information on cancer types search, choose a cancer topic on the home page  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
- ✱ National Cancer Institute (US)  
contains information for patients and health professionals on the different types of cancer, staging and treatments. [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)
- ✱ Contact your local council for services in your area

## Other languages

Contact the Cancer Council Victoria for cancer information in other languages:

Arabic	9209 0160
Cantonese	9209 0161
Greek	9209 0162
Italian	9209 0163
Mandarin	9209 0164
Polish	9209 0165
Russian	9209 0166
Spanish	9209 0167
Vietnamese	9209 0168
Other languages	9209 0169

For further information in a range of languages visit the Cancer Council Victoria

[www.cancervic.org.au/multilingual](http://www.cancervic.org.au/multilingual)

## References

Information has been sourced for this booklet from the following documents and organisations

- BreastCancer.org  
<http://www.breastcancer.org>
- Breast Cancer Network Australia  
<http://www.bcna.org.au>
- Chemocare.com  
<http://www.chemocare.com>
- Cancerbackup  
<http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk>
- Cancer Council  
[www.cancercouncil.com.au](http://www.cancercouncil.com.au)
- Cancer Council Victoria  
<http://www.cancervic.org.au>
- Better Health Channel  
[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)
- Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre  
[www.petermac.org](http://www.petermac.org)
- Chemotherapy Companion, Hume RICS, Regional Integrated Cancer Service

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