

# Chemotherapy Patient Education Class

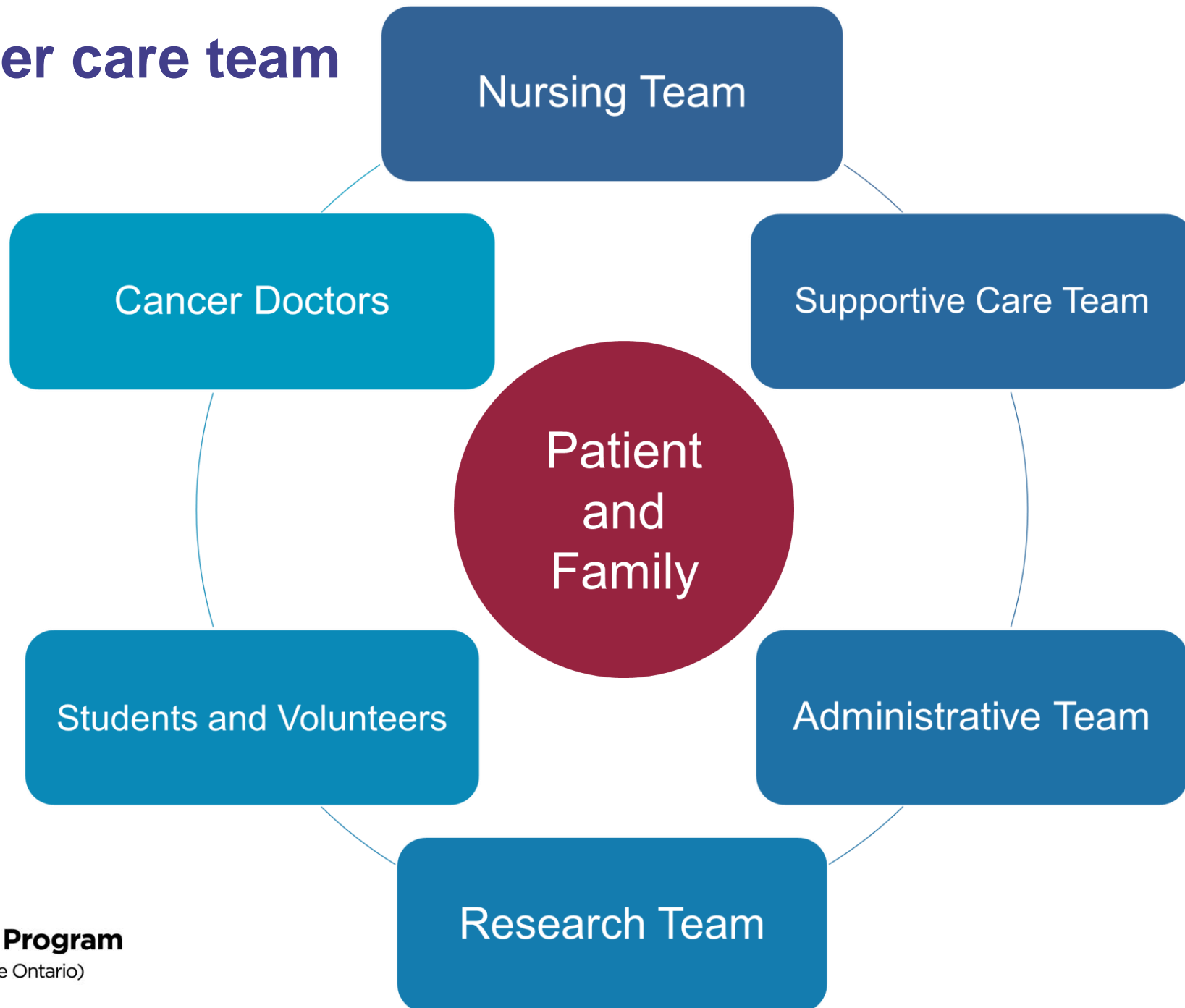
For patients and care partners

Last updated January 2026

# Class Overview

- Your Cancer Care team
- What is Chemotherapy
- Side effects and how to manage them
- What to expect during your chemotherapy treatment
- Resources available to you

# Your cancer care team



# Cancer Centre of Southeastern Ontario Contact Information

Monday to Friday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. call 613-549-6666 and Press 7

Appointments  
Press 1

Press 1 to speak to someone about your **doctor's appointment** or for **lab results**.  
Press 2 to speak to someone about your **chemotherapy** or **immunotherapy** appointment.  
Press 3 to speak to someone about your **radiation treatment** appointment.  
Press 4 to speak to someone about your **social work** or **dietitian** appointment.  
Press 5 for all other appointment types.

Supportive and  
Palliative Care  
Press 2

Press 2 if you are being followed by the **Supportive and Palliative Care team** and want to speak with someone.

Symptom Support  
Press 3

Leave a detailed message with your cancer symptom concern including:

- Full name
- Date of Birth
- Cancer Doctor's name
- A description of your concern

A nurse will call you back in order of issue seriousness.

# After Hours Contact Information

**Monday to Friday after 4 p.m. and 24 hours a day on weekends and holidays**

- Call **CAREchart@home**, after hours symptom management telephone service
- **1-877-681-3057**
- You will be connected to a specialized cancer care nurse who will help you.



**South East  
Regional Cancer Program**  
Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario)

**Kingston Health  
Sciences Centre**  
Centre des sciences de  
la santé de Kingston

**CAREchart@home app** is available to download from the App Store and Google Play

Features of the app:

- Pre-register and save time if you need to call
- Choose a telephone or video call with the oncology nurse

# What is Chemotherapy?

- Chemotherapy is a general term for drugs that:
  - destroy cancer cells or
  - slow cancer cells from growing/multiplying
- Targets cancer cells in areas of your body that sometimes radiation or surgery cannot reach
- Can be used alone or in combination with other forms of treatment
- There are hundreds of different kinds of chemotherapy drugs!



# How is Chemotherapy Given?



- You may get one chemotherapy drug or a combination of different chemotherapy drugs
  - This is called a Protocol or Regimen
- Most commonly given by :
  - Mouth as a pill, capsule or liquid
  - Directly into your vein (using an IV or venous access device, like a PICC Line or Port a Cath)
  - Injection under the skin



# Treatment Schedule

- Chemotherapy is usually given in cycles.
- Each cycle includes a clinic visit, a treatment visit and time off between treatments.



Clinic Visit



Treatment Visit



Time off

**You will get more information about your treatment schedule from your cancer care team.**



# Taking Care of Your Emotional Health

You may be feeling some or all of these emotions:

Anger

Anxiety

Sadness

Fear or uncertainty

These emotions are normal and a natural response to stress.



## Tips on Managing

### Find Support:

Talk to someone you trust who is a good listener.

Let your cancer care team know how you are doing.

Social workers are available to see you and/or your family for support.

Get counselling to help you cope.

Focus on things that make you feel better.

Try relaxation activities.

Make lists of calming, enjoyable and useful activities.

### Take care of your body:

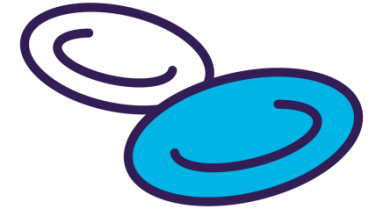
Eat well

Exercise

Improve your Sleep

Limit Alcohol

# What are the Side Effects of Chemotherapy?



- Chemotherapy can destroy or slow the growth of cancer cells, but it also affects normal cells
- Normal cells most commonly affected are blood cells, cells in the gut, mouth, skin and nails, and hair follicles
- Damage to normal cells is the reason for many of the side effects
  - Fortunately, most side effects are temporary

# Common Side Effects

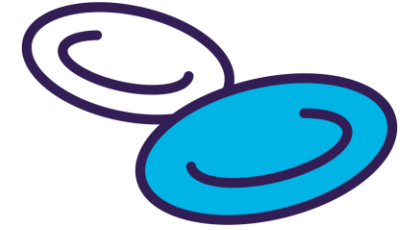


- Low blood counts
  - White blood cells (WBC)
  - Platelets
  - Red blood cells (RBC)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Bowel changes (diarrhea, constipation)
- Mouth sores
- Fatigue
- Hair loss

## **Your side effects will depend on the:**

- type of chemotherapy you get,
- the dose you are given, and
- how your body reacts to chemotherapy.

# Low Blood Counts



You have 3 kinds of blood cells:

- White Blood Cells: help fight infection
- Platelets: help form blood clots
- Red Blood Cells: carry oxygen to your tissues

**To monitor your blood counts, you will get regular blood tests**

# Low White Blood Cells (neutropenia)

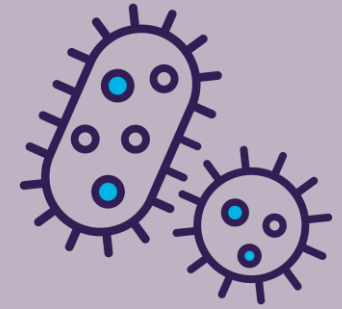
- When: 7-14 days after chemotherapy
- What: Risk of Infection

## Tips on Managing



- ✓ **Wash your hands often.**
- ✓ Try to stay away from people who have colds, flu, or other spreadable diseases.
- ✓ Know the signs of an infection (see next slide).
- ✓ Check your temperature with a digital oral thermometer daily, and if you feel hot or unwell (for example, chills).
- x Do not take medications that treat a fever, for example Tylenol, before you take your temperature as they may hide a fever.

# Know the signs of an infection



- A temperature of 38.3° C (100.9° F) or higher ↑ once OR
- 38.0° C (100.4° F) for over an hour

**Go to your nearest Emergency Department right away with your Fever Card (even if you feel well)**



- Loose bowel movements
- Chills/sweating
- Burning or frequent urination
- Severe cough, sore throat or mouth sores
- An open area that appears red or swollen

**Call your cancer care team.  
Do not wait until your next appointment  
to report these symptoms**

# FEVER CARD

If you have had a cancer drug therapy in the last 30 days AND have a fever, go to your nearest Emergency Department. This may be a medical EMERGENCY.

**South East  
Regional Cancer Program**  
Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario)

**Kingston Health  
Sciences Centre**  
Centre des sciences de  
la santé de Kingston

## Patient Instructions:

You have a fever if your temperature taken by mouth (oral temperature) is:

- **38.3°C (100.9°F)** or higher at any time **OR**
- **38.0°C (100.4°F)** or higher for at least one hour

**Do not take anything to treat your fever.**

Bring this card and a written list of all your medications with you to the ER.

# Low platelet count

- When: 7-14 days after chemotherapy
- What: Risk of Bleeding (may have bruising or small red dots on skin)

## Tips on Managing

- ✓ Use a soft tooth brush and electric razor
- × Do not do activities that may cause injury
- × Do not take the following without speaking to your cancer care team:
  - Any new medications (including herbal supplements)
  - Aspirin or ibuprofen (like Advil, Motrin). However, If taking aspirin or blood thinners regularly for other medical problems, do not stop taking it before you have discussed this with your doctor
- ✓ **If you have any unusual bleeding call your doctor or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away**



# Low red blood cells (anemia)

A low red blood cell count can make you feel tired.



## Tips on Managing

- ✓ Get plenty of rest. Keep activity times short with rest periods in between
- × Do not do heavy or strenuous work or exercise
- ✓ Eat a well-balanced diet
- ✓ **Call your doctor or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away if you feel:**
  - ✓ **Dizzy**
  - ✓ **Short of breath**
  - ✓ **Headaches or ringing in your ears**

# Nausea and Vomiting

**When:** Could happen on the days you get treatment and for 1-2 days later.

## Tips on Managing

- ✓ Take anti-nausea medication exactly as prescribed. It is easier to prevent nausea with medications than to treat it once it starts
- ✓ Keep track of when nausea and vomiting happens and tell your cancer care team at your next visit
- ✓ Drink clear fluids and avoid large meals
- ✓ Read the “**How to Manage Your Nausea and Vomiting**” patient guide [https://www.cancercareontario.ca/system/files\\_force/symptoms/ManageNausea.pdf?download=1](https://www.cancercareontario.ca/system/files_force/symptoms/ManageNausea.pdf?download=1)
- ✓ **Contact your doctor if nausea lasts more than 48 hours or vomiting for more than 24 hours**

# Mouth Problem

Mouth sores, redness, and white patches in your mouth or on your tongue; trouble or pain with swallowing



**When:** 7-14 days after your chemotherapy treatment

## Tips on Managing

- ✓ Brush your teeth, gums and tongue after eating and before bed. Use a soft toothbrush.
- ✓ Rinse your mouth with a homemade mouth rinse 4-5 times a day (1 teaspoon baking soda and 1 teaspoon salt in 4 cups of warm water). Do not use mouth washes with alcohol.
- ✓ If your mouth is sore, eat soft, bland foods like cooked cereals, mashed potatoes, and puddings.
- ✓ Read the “**How to Manage Your Mouth Problems**” patient guide  
<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/node/79666>
- ✓ **Tell your cancer care team if you have mouth sores or if your mouth hurts a lot**

## Diarrhea

Can be caused by some types of chemotherapy



### Tips on Managing

- ✓ Take anti-diarrhea medication **if** your health care team prescribed it
- ✓ Rest and **drink lots of fluids**
- × Do not eat natural laxatives like prunes, rhubarb and papaya
- ✓ If you have 6 to 8 (or more) loose bowel movements daily for more than 2 days, call your doctor or go to the nearest Emergency Department
- ✓ Read the diarrhea patient guide  
<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/node/78766>

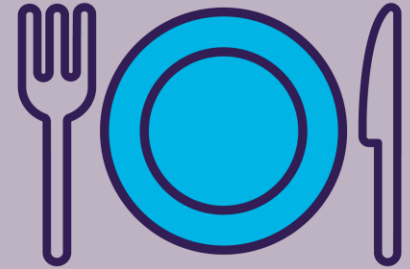
## Constipation

Can be caused by other medications for pain or nausea

### Tips on Managing

- ✓ Like nausea, important to prevent
- ✓ Ask your doctor about laxatives
- ✓ **Drink lots of fluids**
- ✓ Eat more fibre foods (whole grain bread, fruit and vegetables)
- ✓ If you have not had a bowel movement for 3 or more days, call your doctor
- ✓ Read the constipation patient guide  
<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/node/78741>

# Nutrition



**Nutrition is an important part of your cancer treatment.**

**Eating well can help you to:**

- ❖ Maintain your body weight
- ❖ Improve your energy and strength,
- ❖ Lower the risk of infection
- ❖ Assist your body with healing and recovery from cancer treatments.

**Registered Dietitians are available to help you manage symptoms or side effects of chemotherapy:**

- unintentional weight loss
- loss of appetite
- trouble swallowing
- taste changes,
- sore or dry mouth,
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or constipation

**Ask your cancer care team if you would like to speak with a dietitian.**

# Hair Thinning or Loss (Alopecia)

Caused by some, not all chemotherapy

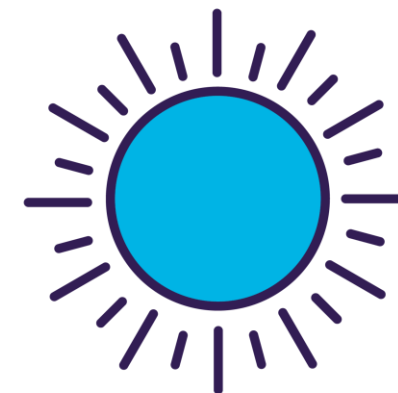
**When:** 2 to 3 weeks after treatment begins. Grows back after treatment ends, but colour and texture may change

## Tips on Managing

- ✓ For long or medium-length hair, you may want to try a short haircut before treatment starts.
- ✓ If you plan to buy a wig, you may want to do so before hair loss happens to match your natural hair colour and texture.
- ✓ Be gentle with your hair.
- ✓ Protect your head from the sun.
- ✓ What's available to you:
  - ✓ Free hand knitted hats in Chemo Treatment Area
  - ✓ **“Hair Pieces and Accessories”** resource  
<https://kingstonhsc.ca/hair-pieces-and-accessories>
  - ✓ Look Good Feel Better Program [www.lgfb.ca](http://www.lgfb.ca)



# Skin and Nail Changes



Skin may become red, dry, itchy or flaky

Finger and toe nails may become darker, yellow, brittle or cracked

## Tips on Managing

- ✓ Bathe in warm water (not hot water)
- ✓ Use gentle soaps, creams and lotions made for sensitive skin
- ✓ Keep nails clean and cut short. Wear gloves when you wash the dishes, work in the garden, or clean the house
- ✓ Try to stay out of direct sunlight and use sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or greater
- ✓ Tell your nurse or doctor if you notice any changes- **especially any tingling, numbness, burning or pain**
- ✓ Look Good Feel Better Program [www.lgfb.ca](http://www.lgfb.ca)

# Fatigue

Feeling tired or a lack of energy that does not go away with sleep or rest. More severe and lasts longer. Almost everyone experiences this!



## Tips on Managing

- ❖ **Pace yourself, do not rush. Put off less important activities.**
- ❖ **Listen to your body. Rest when you need to.**
- ❖ **Read the How to manage your Fatigue patient guide**

<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/node/78776>

## **Take care of your body:**

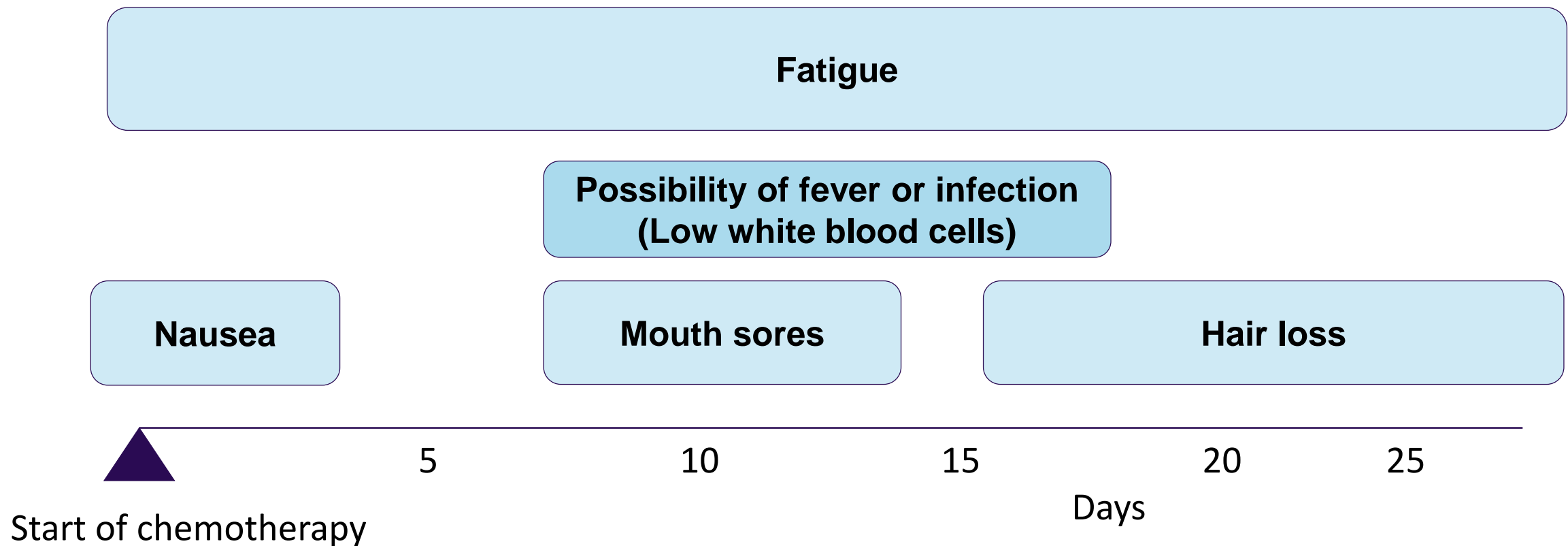
- ✓ Eat well and stay hydrated
- ✓ Exercise. Be active. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days. Start slowly and go at your own pace.
- ✓ Improve your sleep.



# When to Expect Common Side Effects

**Remember: not everyone will have all of these side effects.**

**Talk to your cancer care team for more information**



# Sexual Changes

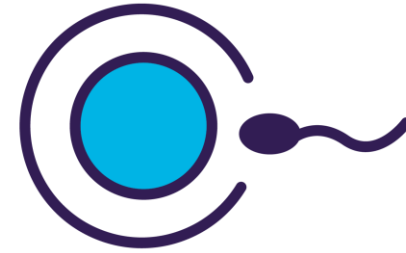


- Physical and emotional changes during chemotherapy can cause sexual side effects
- Common side effects: loss of desire, painful intercourse, changes in orgasm or erection

## Tips on Managing

- ✓ Talk with a nurse, doctor or social worker
- ✓ Be open and honest with your spouse or partner. Talk about your feelings and concerns
- ✓ **If you or your partner are able to become pregnant, you must use birth control**
- ✓ **Use a condom during sexual activity with a partner for 7 days after you get chemotherapy**
- ✓ Ask for a referral to the Cancer Centre Sexual Health Clinic

# Fertility Changes



- Chemotherapy can cause fertility changes in both men and women.

**If you plan to have children in the future or think you might want to, talk to your cancer care team before starting treatment.**

# Safe Handling of Your Bodily Fluids

**When:** for 7 days after each chemotherapy treatment

**Bodily fluids:** urine, vomit, stool, blood, semen and vaginal fluid

## Safety Tips

- ✓ Flush the toilet with the lid down
- ✓ Sit on the toilet when urinating
- ✓ Wear gloves if cleaning up or handling soiled items
- ✓ Double bag **soiled** (has fluids on it) disposable items
- ✓ Wash any soiled linens in your washing machine in hot water
- ✓ Wear a condom during sexual activity
- ✓ Hugging and kissing is safe





# **What to expect during your chemotherapy treatment**

# Cancer Centre Appointments

You will have two kinds of appointments related to your chemotherapy:



Clinic  
visits

Treatment  
Visits



# Clinic Visit



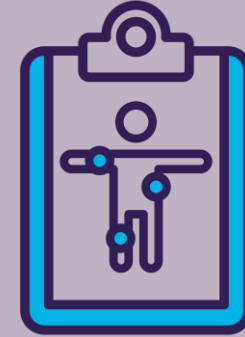
## During this visit you will usually:

- ✓ **Arrive 45 minutes before your appointment time for blood work.**
- ✓ Get blood work done
- ✓ Fill out the “Your Symptoms Matter” questionnaire
- ✓ Be assessed by your Nurse and Doctor

## At this visit you should:

- ✓ Tell your team about how you have been doing and explain any side effects that you may be experiencing
- ✓ Ask your questions or discuss your concerns
- ✓ Bring a notebook to write down important information
- ✓ You are welcome to bring a family member or friend to this appointment

# Your Symptoms Matter



- We ask you to fill out a symptom assessment self-questionnaire at every clinic visit.
- Your Symptoms Matter questionnaire asks you to rate common symptoms on a scale of 0 to 10.
- **Your symptom scores help us to understand how you are feeling.**



Symptom  
Management Desk  
located on Burr 1

Scan this QR code  
to fill out the  
Your Symptoms Matter  
questionnaire on your device





# Treatment Visits

**Step 1: Register on Burr 0**

**Step 2: Wait in treatment area waiting room**

**What will happen while chemotherapy is given?**

- Sit in a recliner chair
- Nurse will start your IV (if needed)
- Pre-medications may be given
- Chemotherapy treatment will start
  - Most patients do not feel pain or anything unusual. If you do, tell your nurse right away
- IV will be disconnected
- You may be given a prescription for medications to help with side effects

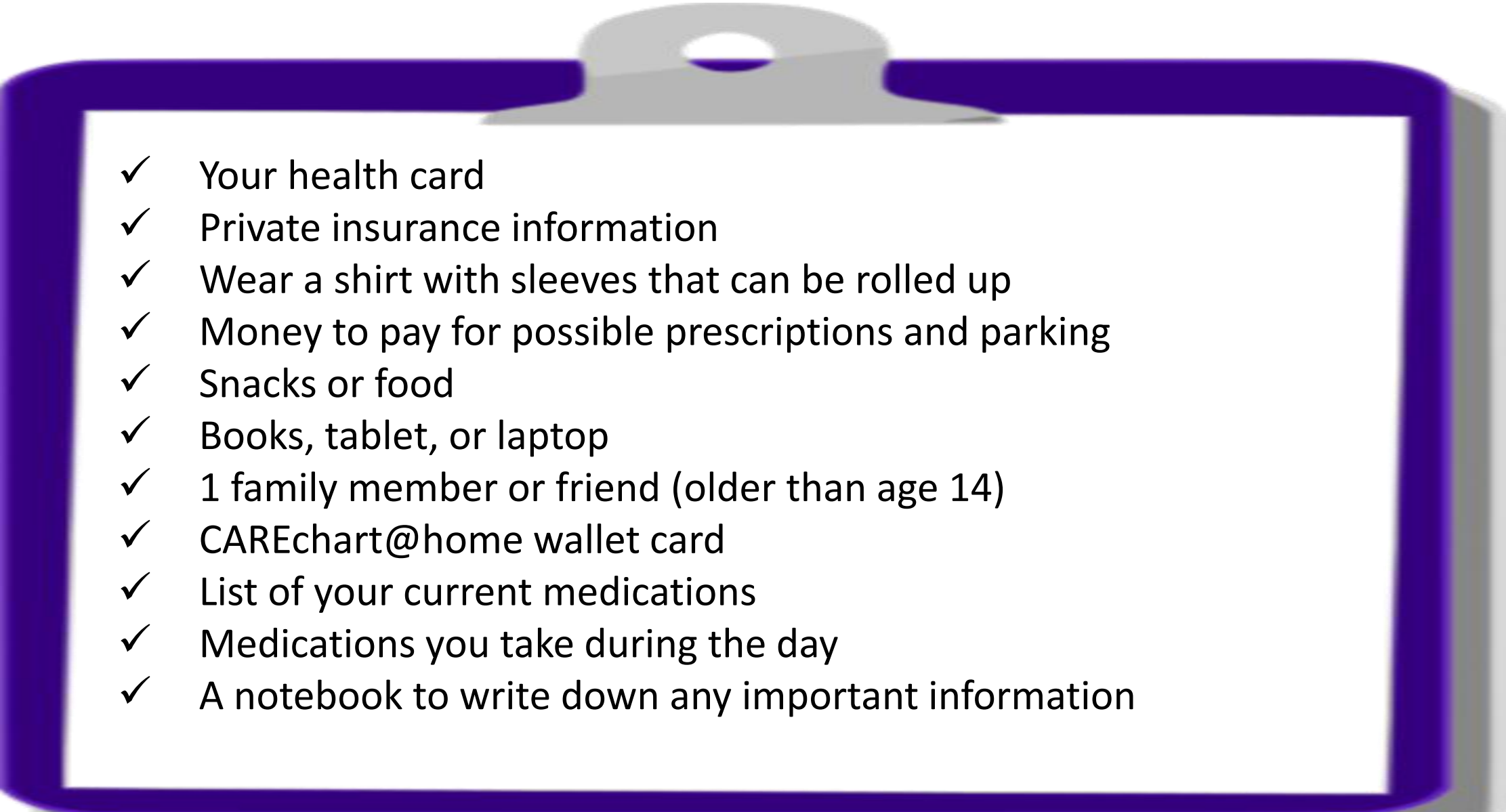


Cancer Centre of  
Southeastern Ontario

# Preparing for Treatment

- The registration clerk will phone you three days before your appointment date with your treatment time. You can ask the clerk how long you should plan to be here.
- Have someone available to drive you home after your treatment.
- Eat a light meal prior to your treatment (breakfast or lunch).
- You will see a Cancer Center pharmacist on your first treatment day.

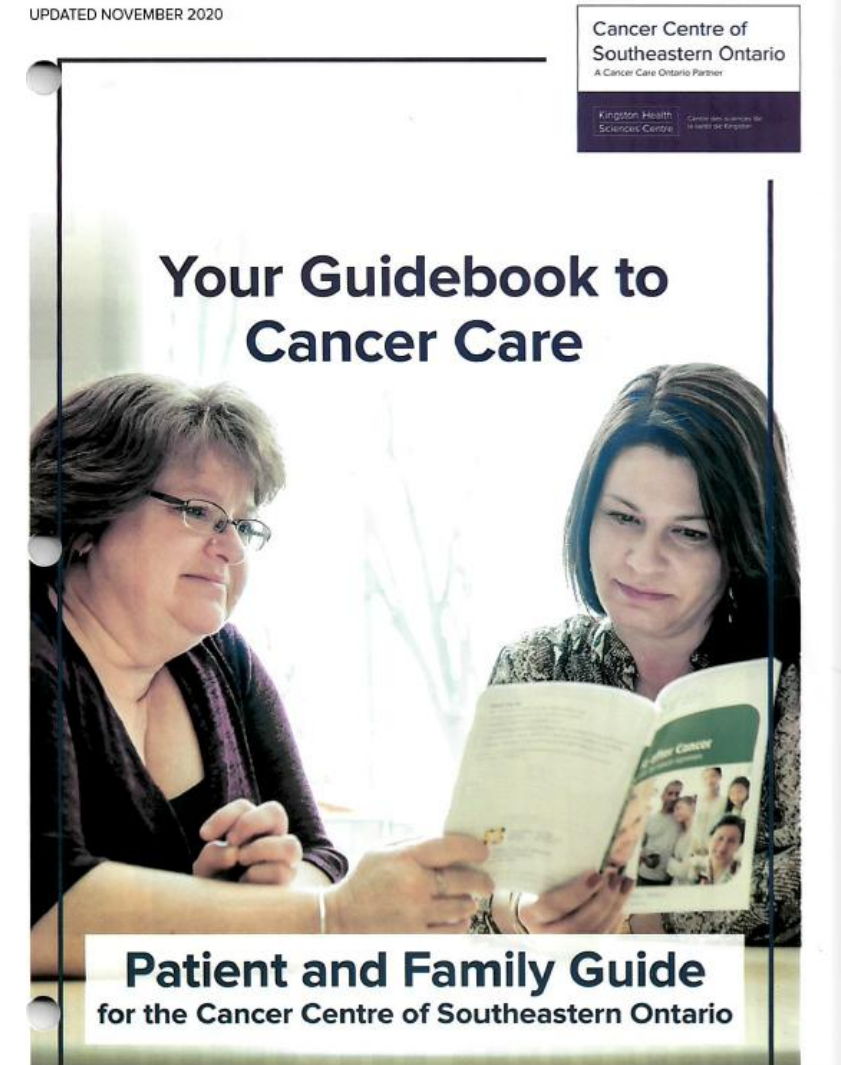
# What to Bring to Treatment Visits

- 
- ✓ Your health card
  - ✓ Private insurance information
  - ✓ Wear a shirt with sleeves that can be rolled up
  - ✓ Money to pay for possible prescriptions and parking
  - ✓ Snacks or food
  - ✓ Books, tablet, or laptop
  - ✓ 1 family member or friend (older than age 14)
  - ✓ CAREchart@home wallet card
  - ✓ List of your current medications
  - ✓ Medications you take during the day
  - ✓ A notebook to write down any important information

# Paying for Drugs

Your treatment plan may include drugs that are not paid by OHIP.

- ✓ Know what kind of drug coverage you have before you start treatment
- ✓ Refer to your **guidebook** to find out what you need to know before you start treatment
- ✓ Our **drug access coordinator** or **social workers** can answer your questions (contact information in the guidebook)





# Chemotherapy Closer to Home

It may be possible to get your chemotherapy and other supportive treatments in:

- ✓ Napanee
- ✓ Brockville
- ✓ Perth

Ask your nurse or  
doctor for more  
information

# Cancer Clinical Research

The standard cancer treatments used today were made and tested in clinical research studies years ago.

- If you are interested in learning more about research at the Cancer Centre talk to a member of your cancer care team or email  
CC-ClinicalTrials@kingstonhsc.ca
- Learn how clinical trials shape future patient care: <http://itstartswithme.ca/>
- Learn more about clinical trials: <https://cancer.ca/en/treatments/clinical-trials>

# Services and Resources



- Canadian Cancer Society [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)
- Wellspring [www.wellspring.ca](http://www.wellspring.ca)
- Gilda's Club [www.gildasclubtoronto.org](http://www.gildasclubtoronto.org)
- Young Adult Cancer Canada [www.youngadultcancer.ca](http://www.youngadultcancer.ca)
- Community support groups and organizations



# Questions?

[www.kingstonhsc.ca/cancer-care](http://www.kingstonhsc.ca/cancer-care)

