

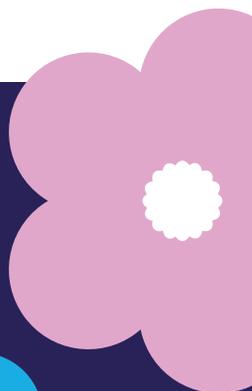
Chemotherapy for Mesothelioma



MESOTHELIOMA UK

www.mesothelioma.uk.com

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Introduction

There are various treatments for mesothelioma. Some aim to actively control the cancer whereas others focus on managing the symptoms (known as supportive care).

Treatments to control the cancer can include:

- surgery
- radiotherapy
- chemotherapy
- immunotherapy
- targeted therapy

You may have just one of these types of treatments or a combination of them.

Drug treatments such as chemotherapy and immunotherapy are sometimes called Systemic Anti-Cancer

Therapy (SACT). It is called systemic because the treatments are carried in the bloodstream to wherever the cancer cells are in the body.

This booklet focuses on chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is used to try and shrink the disease and relieve some of the symptoms. This may improve quality of life. It is possible it may also help some people with mesothelioma to live longer, however it cannot cure mesothelioma.

The type of chemotherapy outlined in this booklet is given for all types of mesothelioma.

If you have peritoneal mesothelioma, chemotherapy can sometimes be delivered

directly to the peritoneum (lining of the stomach). This is explained more fully in the peritoneal mesothelioma information available on our website.

Is it right for me?

Chemotherapy is not for everyone and it is important to talk to your family and healthcare team about what it involves for you. For some people chemotherapy can cause more harm than good.

Age does not usually determine whether or not people should have chemotherapy, but it can make it harder for the body to cope with the side effects of treatment. Your healthcare team will discuss your individual circumstances with you. If you decide not to have treatment it will not affect the care you are offered.

What it is

Chemotherapy uses anti-cancer (cytotoxic) drugs to destroy cancer cells.

“So here we are, chemotherapy day unit. Ready, and reluctantly willing. I’ve been super nervous about today, as I suspect most people are before embarking on their chemotherapy journey.”

Helen

Chemotherapy for Mesothelioma

They work by disrupting the growth of cancer cells. The chemotherapy drugs that may be used for the treatment of mesothelioma include Cisplatin (Platinol), Carboplatin (Paraplatin), Gemcitabine (Gemzar), Pemetrexed (Alimta) and Vinorelbine (Navelbine).

Different chemotherapy drugs work in different ways. You may be given a combination of drugs to try to maximise the effect on the cancer cells.

When it is given

In mesothelioma there is, as yet, no agreement among experts as to when to use chemotherapy. You may have chemotherapy very quickly after diagnosis or your healthcare team may

suggest monitoring your mesothelioma and delay treatment until the disease starts to grow.

How it is given

Chemotherapy drugs can be given in a number of ways. These include:

- By injection into a vein or through a drip. A fine needle called a cannula will be inserted into a vein, usually in the back of the hand. This is no more painful than any other injection or blood test. An infusion pump is often used to deliver the treatment into the bloodstream at a controlled rate over a number of minutes or hours. This will be attached to the cannula by a length of tubing.

- By mouth. Some chemotherapy drugs are given as a tablet, capsule or liquid.

Making the decision

Before you begin chemotherapy treatment, your health care team will explain what is involved and answer any questions you may have.

You will be given information about your treatment to take home and read. If you have questions about the proposed treatment, or need more time to decide, let your team know.

You must give consent to receive chemotherapy and will be asked to sign a consent form.

What to expect

Treatment is usually given

on an oncology day unit. The doctors and nurses there will have had specialist chemotherapy training. Most chemotherapy is given as an outpatient. This means you attend for all or part of a day.

You can eat and drink normally on the day of your treatment. However, it is best not to have a heavy meal prior to your chemotherapy session.

As people respond differently to treatment you may want to plan ahead and think about how you will travel to and from your chemotherapy sessions.

Sessions can take a number of hours, try to take something to read or do whilst you are there to

pass the time and keep you occupied.

How often will I have it?

Chemotherapy is given in cycles to target the cancer cells over a period of time. One cycle of treatment will usually last a few weeks but you may only receive treatment once in that time. For example, a cycle may last 21 days with treatment given on day one. At the end of the cycle the next one will begin. A whole course of chemotherapy will take a number of months.

As well as attending the oncology unit for treatment, there will be regular hospital visits to see the oncologist. This gives you the chance to discuss how treatment is

progressing and have scans to see whether or not the chemotherapy is helping to control the disease.

Side effects

“What has hit me more this time is the tiredness and a total lack of energy”

Dave

Chemotherapy drugs act on the cancer cells in the body, but they can also temporarily affect some of the normal cells causing side effects.

People respond to treatment differently so it is difficult to know exactly how you will feel. But it is likely you will experience some side effects.

Blood cell effects

Chemotherapy can reduce

the number of blood cells you have. To monitor your levels, you will have regular blood tests, called full blood counts. Your healthcare team will be particularly interested in:

Red blood cells – a low level of red blood cells is called anaemia, this can make you feel tired, breathless and dizzy. If this occurs you may be offered a blood transfusion to help you feel better.

White blood cells – these cells fight and prevent infection occurring, chemotherapy temporarily lowers these cells making you less resistant to infection. Levels will gradually return to normal before the next cycle. You must tell your healthcare team

if you develop a temperature or feel unwell as infections while on chemotherapy need very prompt treatment.

Platelets - these blood cells form clots and help prevent bleeding. Chemotherapy can reduce the number of platelets in the blood. This can mean you bruise or bleed more easily, and you might experience:

- Nosebleeds
- Bleeding gums after brushing your teeth
- Tiny red spots or bruises on your arms or legs (petechiae)

Talk to your healthcare team if you notice any unusual bleeding, sometimes the platelets need to be replaced by a platelet infusion.

Feeling sick

Some chemotherapy drugs can cause you to have nausea (feel sick). You will be given anti sickness medication to help with this (anti-emetics). You should tell your healthcare team if you are struggling with nausea and/or vomiting during chemotherapy.

Appetite and taste changes

Chemotherapy can affect your appetite and taste, meaning some foods can taste different to normal and some people describe a metallic taste when having chemotherapy. It is important to try to maintain a healthy balanced diet, there is lots of advice available to help with this during

treatment. Your healthcare team will monitor your weight during the course of chemotherapy.

Hair Loss

You are unlikely to lose all of your hair with chemotherapy given for mesothelioma, but you may notice some thinning. Hair loss can occur after the first or second cycle, usually these effects are temporary and your hair will grow back after the treatment is completed. You can talk to your healthcare team if you are worried.

Sore mouth

Chemotherapy can cause problems in the mouth, such as thrush, mouth ulcers and infections. Thrush can be treated

with antifungal medication and mouth ulcers can be treated with gels and mouthwashes.

You may be advised to see a dentist before starting chemotherapy to make sure there are no dental problems which could cause an issue during the treatment.

Tiredness

Chemotherapy can make you feel very tired. This can happen throughout the treatment and it can be worse towards the end of the chemotherapy.

Your healthcare team will try to identify if there are other factors leading to the tiredness, such as anaemia, to make sure appropriate treatment is given. It is important to balance rest with

maintaining gentle exercise such as walking. Tiredness may last for some months after finishing treatment.

These are some of the more common side effects people experience. However, side effects can differ from drug to drug and you should read the information on your particular chemotherapy for more specific side effects.

What happens after chemotherapy treatment

Once the treatment is finished your healthcare team will discuss what will happen next. This will depend on whether the chemotherapy has made a difference to the mesothelioma and

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whether you need to consider any other treatment straight after. It may also depend on how you are feeling after having chemotherapy.

If you are having a break from treatment you will usually have follow-ups with either the oncology or the chest team at your hospital.

For some people the end of treatment can feel like a strange time. Hospital visits often become less frequent, and you may worry about how you will know if your mesothelioma starts to grow again.

You will usually be offered clinic appointments to check how you are and this may include an X-ray or a computerised tomography (CT) scan at

certain intervals to monitor your mesothelioma for changes.

You will be given contact numbers to use should you have any concerns in the meantime.

Emotions

Having chemotherapy can provoke feelings of stress and anxiety. Talking can be really helpful. For many, talking to friends and family is enough, but for others, talking to a professional is easier and feels safer. Professionals include doctors, nurses, counsellors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, or people who provide complementary therapies such as massage, reflexology or relaxation.

You can also ask your nurse or your cancer information centre if there are any local support groups. Support groups provide guidance and information and are a place where you can meet other people with mesothelioma who may understand how you are feeling.

Mesothelioma UK

Mesothelioma UK is a charity for anyone affected by mesothelioma.

You can talk to our team, including our Clinical Nurse Specialists. They will be able to give you additional information and support, as well as signpost you to further resources.

Call **freephone 0800 169 2409**
or email **support@mesothelioma.uk.com**

Mesothelioma UK

provides specialist, impartial, up to date support and information.



To sponsor or donate contact: Mesothelioma UK

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