

If tests show that you have cancer, your doctor will suggest which treatment will be best for you. This information sheet describes the common treatments for cancer.

There are many different cancers. A treatment that is best for one cancer won't necessarily be the best treatment for a different sort of cancer.

Ask your doctor to explain anything you do not understand. You can take a relative or friend with you when the doctor talks about your treatment. You could write what the doctor says, or ask if you can tape-record the talk. These will help you remember what your doctor says.

If your doctor does not speak your language, and your English is not fluent, it is recommended that you use an interpreter at important meetings about your treatment. Ask your doctor to arrange for an interpreter to attend your discussions.

You will need some time to decide about your treatment. Be sure you understand what is involved. Ask your doctor how much time you can have to make your decision.

People with cancer may have one, two or more different types of treatment—it depends on the type of cancer they have. In some cases treatment is not recommended.

Some people decide they do not want treatment. People have a right to refuse medical treatment. They need to discuss this decision carefully with their doctor and be sure they understand how the cancer will progress if they do not have treatment.

Questions to ask your doctor about treatment:

- Why do you recommend this treatment?
- What are the side effects?
- After treatment, how long do I need to wait before I can go back to work? How long before I can continue my normal activities?
- When will I know if the treatment has worked?
- Is there anything I need to do before, during or after the treatment?
- Will I need to have more than one type of treatment?
- Where will I have the treatment?
- How much will it cost? Is it fully covered by Medicare/my private health insurance?
- If I decide I want a second opinion, could you refer me to someone?

Surgery

Surgery can remove some or all of a cancer.

Some surgery is minor, such as cutting out a small skin cancer or having a biopsy. Other surgery is major, such as when a cancer is removed from a body organ.

Surgery can also be done to rebuild a body part or replace a body part (for example, breast reconstruction after breast surgery).

A person usually has a general anaesthetic before surgery. A general anaesthetic makes a person sleep and feel no pain until the anaesthetic wears off. Sometimes people feel sick when they wake up after an anaesthetic. The doctors and nurses can give medicine to help a person feel less sick.

Surgery affects each person differently. Some people recover in a few days. For people who have major surgery, it can be weeks or months before they feel normal.

If you have surgery, your nurse or doctor will explain how to care for your body while you recover. Recovery might affect what you can eat or how much exercise you can do. If you are not sure what to do, ask your doctor or nurse.

It is normal to have some pain after surgery. Make sure you ask for medicines to relieve the pain as often as you need them.

Surgery may be the first treatment for cancer. Later the person may have chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy.

Questions to ask your doctor about surgery:

- Will I have pain when I wake up from the anaesthetic?
- Will I be able to eat and get out of bed when I wake up from surgery?
- Will I have tubes in my body? Where, and what will they be for?
- What can I do to help myself get better after the surgery?
- What other treatment will I need?

► English

Cancer information line:

- English
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Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy for cancer is medicine that can kill cancer cells while doing the least possible damage to normal cells. Chemotherapy stops cancer cells from multiplying.

Chemotherapy is sometimes the first treatment for cancer. However, usually a person has chemotherapy after other treatments. Chemotherapy can help kill cancer cells that escape surgery and radiotherapy.

Some people need to have chemotherapy while they stay in hospital. Other people can visit the hospital for a few hours to have their chemotherapy. Sometimes chemotherapy can be given at home.

A person usually has chemotherapy over several hours for a few days, followed by a rest of two to three weeks. A person usually has several courses of treatment over several months.

Chemotherapy is usually given by injection into a vein. Some people have a tube put under their skin to help them have regular chemotherapy into a vein. This prevents too much damage to the veins. The tube stays in until the course of chemotherapy finishes. Chemotherapy can also be taken in tablets, by injection into a muscle or onto the skin in a cream.

Chemotherapy can cause temporary side effects. It can cause vomiting, nausea and loss of hair from the head and body. Medicine can help with nausea and vomiting. Hair that is lost during chemotherapy starts to grow again a couple of months after the treatment stops.

Chemotherapy can also cause long-term side effects. It can affect a person's fertility, for example, your periods might stop for a while or forever. If you plan to have children, but need to have chemotherapy, ask your doctor what you can do. For example, men might be able to have their sperm stored at a clinic or hospital.

Questions to ask your doctor about chemotherapy:

- How long will the treatment take?
- Which side effects am I likely to have?
- Are there any long-term effects from the treatment?
- What can I do to care for myself while I am having chemotherapy?

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy is a treatment that uses radiation. Radiation is a sort of energy. It can stop cancer cells from multiplying. Radiotherapy can also affect normal cells but they can recover.

Radiotherapy can be given in two ways: from outside or inside the body. From outside, the radiation is directed from a machine at the cancer and the tissue around it. From inside the body, radioactive material in capsules is put into the body, on or near the cancer. (If men have this type of radiotherapy for prostate cancer they are advised to use a condom during sex for the first two weeks after the capsules are put in. They should speak to their doctors about this.) Radiotherapy does not make a person radioactive and the treatments do not hurt. The radiation is not hot.

Some people need only one treatment, others need several. Each treatment only takes a few minutes but allow more time for your visit. The number of days a person needs to have treatment can vary. Your doctor will decide the number of treatments to suit you.

Some people have side effects from radiotherapy. They include tiredness, skin redness or a burning feeling, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Some people do not have side effects.

Questions to ask your doctor about radiotherapy:

- How long will my treatment take?
- Which side effects might I have?
- How can I care for myself while I am having radiotherapy?

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Immunotherapy

The immune system is a network of cells and organs that defends the body against infection and disease. It can tell the difference between normal and cancer cells. Immunotherapy uses drugs that stimulate the immune system to work to fight the cancer.

People have immunotherapy by mouth, or by injection into a vein or under the skin.

Immunotherapy can cause side effects, often like the 'flu. People can get chills, sweats, tiredness, headaches, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea.

Questions to ask your doctor about immunotherapy:

- How will I feel when I have the treatment?
- Do I need to take any special precautions while I am having the treatment?

Hormone therapy

Some cancers (like prostate cancer and some breast cancers) rely on hormones produced by the body to grow. Treatment can stop the body producing these hormones. People can be treated with medicines, or may have surgery to remove the organ that produces the hormones. Treatment depends on the type of cancer a person has.

Side effects from hormone treatment can include an increased appetite, fluid retention and weight gain. People's moods and sexual desire can sometimes be affected.

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