



25 important things you need to know about chemotherapy, including its procedure and what to expect

1 When should I get my tests done before chemotherapy?

For three weekly chemo sessions, we recommend getting your tests done a week (7 days) before your next chemotherapy session.

For weekly chemo: You may do your tests a few days before your session.

2. What is the chemotherapy schedule, date and time?

Once the Oncologist prescribes your chemotherapy regimen, the Pearl chemo nurse will communicate your next chemo date and time. You will also receive your appointment by SMS on your telephone.

3. How do I get my chemotherapy Invoice?

Based on your chemotherapy prescription, the Client service team will prepare your Invoice and share it with you at least four days before your next chemo appointment. You are expected to make payment at least two days before your chemo appointment. Please share the proof of payment with the Client service via the preferred communication channel.

4. What is chemotherapy counselling?

Chemotherapy counselling is a valuable service that provides accurate information and practical support to individuals undergoing chemotherapy treatment. It's a 30-minute patient education session in which a

Chemotherapy nurse or medical doctor explains to you and a family member(s) the chemotherapy treatment process, side effect reporting and management, and coping strategies. You can ask any question or raise a concern about chemotherapy.

5. How is chemotherapy given? Oral, IV line and Chemoport?

Chemotherapy can be administered intravenously (via IV line or chemo port) or orally. Depending on the chemotherapy regimen prescribed by your oncologist, it can also be given subcutaneously, intramuscularly, intraperitoneally, or intrathecally.

6. What to expect during chemotherapy infusion?

Chemotherapy infusion is a method of delivering anti-cancer drugs directly into the bloodstream through a vein. It is a common way to administer chemotherapy, and it involves inserting a needle or catheter into a vein in the arm or chest. The chemotherapy medication is then slowly infused into the bloodstream over a period of time, ranging from a few minutes to several hours. You will typically sit in a comfortable reclining chair or lie on a bed during a chemotherapy infusion.

Here's a breakdown of the process:

- **Intravenous access:** Following the sterile procedure, your chemo nurse or Doctor will set a cannula in your arm. If you have a chemo port, a Huber needle will be inserted in the port and flushed.
- **Premedication Infusion:** The Chemotherapy nurse will administer pre-medications, such as anti-vomiting and anti-allergic medications, in intravenous (IV) fluids to help prevent side effects like nausea and vomiting. This drip will last 20-30 minutes.
- **Chemo Infusion:** The chemotherapy nurse will collect your prescribed medications from the pharmacy. Then, the nurse will proceed to the Biosafety cabinet to mix and prepare the chemo infusion according to the oncologist's chemotherapy protocol. The chemotherapy mixture will be connected to the IV access and slowly infused into the bloodstream. You may feel a cold sensation at the

site of the IV. If you notice pain, burning sensation or swelling at the IV site, please inform the nurse immediately.

- **Monitoring:** During the chemo infusion, the nurse will monitor your vital signs and assess for adverse reactions and side effects. Most times, the chemo session goes well with no concerns. However, kindly inform your chemo nurse if you have any discomfort or complaints, e.g., nausea, difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, or feeling unwell.
- **Post-infusion:** After the infusion, the chemotherapy drip bag will be disconnected from the IV access and flushed with plain IV fluids. You may be monitored briefly to ensure no adverse effects.

7. Where would I receive the chemotherapy?

At Pearl Oncology Specialist Hospital, you have two options, depending on your preference: the Private Retreat Plan or Community Comfort.

	Private Retreat	Community Comfort
Location	Tranquil private ensuite room	6-chair chemotherapy suite for a communal yet comforting experience.
Design	Spacious rooms with luxurious amenities.	Thoughtfully designed for your comfort and relaxation.

Accompaniment	One relative is welcome to join you on the ward.	Relatives can wait in the reception but not in the chemo room
Availability	Monday-Sunday provides complete flexibility for your schedule.	Monday-Friday, providing flexibility for your schedule.

8. What are premedication and post-medication?

Chemotherapy premedication refers to the administration of medications before chemotherapy treatment to help prevent or reduce side effects. Premedications usually commence a day before your chemotherapy session. When given after chemotherapy, we call it post-medication. These may last for a few days, and the goal is to reduce any side effects or symptoms that may occur after chemotherapy. Your chemo nurse will advise you on how to take your premedication and post-medication drugs at home.

9. What is a chemo clinic assessment?

On the day of your chemotherapy, a chemotherapy nurse and a medical doctor will assess and review your test results to ensure you are fit for treatment. If your test results are not satisfactory or if there is any clinical reason preventing us from administering chemotherapy, we will discuss this with you during a consultation. You can request a consultation if you need to discuss a complaint with the doctor.

10. What are Chemotherapy Side effects?

The goal of chemotherapy is to damage cancer cells that divide fast. However, in the process of doing this, some normal cells, like the hair cells

gastrointestinal and blood cells that divide fast, are also damaged. The damage to the normal cells are the “side effects”. Your cancer care team will monitor and manage the side effects. The side effects of chemotherapy can vary based on the drugs used, the dosage, the length of treatment, and how a person’s body reacts.

Here are some common side effects that people may experience during chemotherapy:

Nausea & Vomiting, Diarrhea or Constipation, Fatigue, Loss of appetite, Hair loss, Low Blood Counts (Anemia, Thrombocytopenia, Neutropenia), Mouth sores, Skin and nail changes. Some people may experience two side effects, while others may experience more side effects. To learn more about side effects, read the articles and watch the videos on the [PROSECare app](#).

11. Will I lose my hair during chemotherapy?

Hair loss is a common side effect of many chemotherapy drugs. However, the extent of hair loss can vary depending on the type of drug and individual response.

12. What should I do if I have any side effects, and who should I call?

As part of the chemotherapy onboarding process, you must sign up on the PROSEcare app, which allows you to report your chemotherapy side effects daily and receive clinical advice from the cancer care team. If you are concerned about your side effects, call the Pearl Nurse’s line: 09169977892, 08087111629. Our nurses will check in and give you a call 48-72 hours after the chemotherapy.

13. When should I seek urgent medical attention?

Please report to your doctor and seek medical attention if your side effects are persistent or worsening. If you have a fever, chills, or a medical emergency, come into the hospital immediately for prompt care. We strongly encourage you to consult your cancer care team regarding your specific symptom or side effect to receive personalized advice. The

information in this material is intended to be helpful and educational, but it is not a substitute for medical consultation with your oncology team.

14. The names of the chemotherapy drugs are not easy to remember. Is it important I know my chemo regimen?

Yes, you must know about your chemotherapy regimen, as it will empower you to take an active role in your treatment and make informed decisions about your care. The Pearl team will share your chemotherapy prescription and plan with you on a written document. Please take a picture to have it somewhere within easy reach, e.g., save it on your phone.

Here are three reasons why it is so important

- Knowing specific drugs' names and combinations can help you understand your treatment's potential benefits and risks. This knowledge empowers you to ask informed questions and decide about your care.
- Sometimes, you may need to share the name of the chemo regimen with other healthcare providers; knowing your chemo regimen ensures that all parties are on the same page regarding treatment plans, potential side effects, and any necessary adjustments.
- Knowing the regimen name enables you or a family caregiver to research the treatment online or through reputable sources, gaining a deeper understanding of your condition and treatment options.

15. Do I need to take blood boosters and supplements when on chemotherapy?

Yes, you need blood supplements when on chemotherapy. Your doctor or nurse will recommend the appropriate diet, suitable blood supplements, and vitamins to boost your blood levels. Chemotherapy can affect the bone marrow, which produces blood cells. As a result, your care team routinely monitors your blood cells through the complete blood count test. Your blood counts may drop, leading to anaemia (low red blood cells), neutropenia (low white blood cells), or thrombocytopenia (low platelets). Low blood counts can cause fatigue, increased infection risk, and easy bleeding.

16. Can I eat or drink before coming for chemotherapy?

Yes, you can generally eat before chemotherapy. However, it's crucial to follow your healthcare provider's specific instructions. Some doctors may advise against eating or drinking certain things before treatment, especially if you're receiving medications that can cause nausea or vomiting. Here are some general guidelines:

- **Light Meal:** A light meal, such as a slice of boiled yam and your favourite sauce, bread and egg, or a bowl of cereal, pap, or a small portion of rice, can help stabilize your blood sugar levels.
- **Avoid Heavy Foods:** Avoid heavy, greasy, or spicy foods which can upset your stomach.
- **Hydration:** Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water. We recommend drinking at least 3 litres of water a day. Feel free to bring your water bottle and take some water sips while receiving chemotherapy.

Please consult a registered dietitian at Pearl Oncology to receive personalised dietary advice. You can schedule an appointment by informing your chemo nurse or contacting Client Services.

17. Is it necessary to check my vital signs before taking chemotherapy?

Yes, it is important to check your vital signs before commencing chemotherapy. Your healthcare team will monitor your vital signs to ensure that you are in a stable condition to receive chemotherapy and to detect any issues that might need to be addressed before proceeding with and during treatment.

18. Why does a healthcare professional review my test results before I start chemotherapy?

A healthcare professional must review your test results before every chemotherapy session because they provide critical information about your overall health. The cancer care team wants to know the two Fs: function and fitness.

Chemotherapy drugs are powerful and can affect many systems in your body. Your cancer care team needs to assess if you are **fit** for treatment and if your organs can process and get rid of the chemotherapy drugs.

Critical organs, like your liver, heart, bone marrow, and kidney, may be affected by chemotherapy treatment or the cancer itself. So, your doctor or nurse will closely monitor how these organs **function**, and if an impairment is noticed, a decision will be made to adjust the dose or frequency or change the chemotherapy drug. This is done to help your body recover.

19. What is a chemotherapy kit?

A chemo kit is a bag containing comfort items designed to help people undergoing chemotherapy manage the side effects of treatment. It usually contains blankets, pillows, eye masks, etc. It may also include

- **Nausea Relief:** Ginger candies, peppermint tea, etc.
- **Oral Care Products:** Toothpaste, mouthwash, lip balm
- **Hydration:** Water bottles, electrolyte drinks
- **Entertainment:** Books, magazines, tablets, etc

20. What is a family member's role as I take chemotherapy?

Family members serve as a support system while receiving chemotherapy. This may include immediate or extended family members or friends/loved ones. They can help with daily tasks post-chemotherapy, accompany you to chemotherapy appointments, financially support you, and offer encouragement. Sometimes, their presence alone goes a long way.

21. Why are people scared of chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy is a complex medical treatment, and many people feel anxious about the unknown. They may worry about the side effects, the impact on their daily life, and the overall experience. Misconceptions and negative stereotypes about chemotherapy can also contribute to fear.

Some people may associate chemotherapy with pain, suffering, and a poor prognosis.

It's important to remember that while chemotherapy can be challenging, it's an effective treatment option that has helped countless people overcome cancer. Modern medical advancements have led to less severe side effects and more targeted treatments. If you or someone you know is facing chemotherapy, you must talk to your doctor about your concerns and explore ways to manage any fears or anxieties.

22. Can I use the restroom or sleep during chemotherapy?

Yes, it is common for people to need the restroom during chemotherapy. If you need to pee or do the big job, all you have to do is inform the chemo nurse, who will disconnect the IV cannula so that you can honour the call of nature. Once you are back, the chemotherapy mixture will be reconnected, and the infusion will continue.

At Pearl, our chemotherapy chairs are made from the finest quality leather, and our beds are designed to promote good sleep during chemotherapy. If you feel sleepy, please be our guest. We would love to hear you snore just a little bit.

23. What type of clothes should I wear for chemotherapy?

When choosing what to wear for chemotherapy, prioritize comfort and easy access to your chemo port. Choose loose-fitting clothes made from soft, breathable fabrics like cotton or silk. Avoid tight clothing or embellishments that can restrict movement or irritate the skin. We recommend a button-down shirt or a V-neck top for the nurse to access the chemo port easily. Please come with a cover cloth or sweater because chemotherapy can cause fluctuations in body temperature. We are happy to provide you with a blanket and pillow if you require one. Lastly, wear comfortable, closed-toe shoes or slippers. Avoid high heels or tight-fitting shoes. If you're experiencing hair loss, consider wearing a turban, scarf, or wig.

24. Should I isolate myself when on chemotherapy?

Generally, you don't need to isolate yourself entirely during chemotherapy. While it's important to take precautions to protect your immune system, social isolation can be detrimental to your mental and emotional health. However, there are some specific precautions you may need to take, especially during the first few days after treatment:

- **Avoid Crowds:** This minimises your risk of infection, as your immune system may be weakened.
- **Practice Good Hygiene:** Wash your hands frequently before eating or touching your face.
- **Consult Your Doctor:** Always consult your doctor about specific precautions, especially if you experience severe side effects, such as a weakened immune system.

Remember, maintaining social connections is crucial for mental health. It's important to balance your need for rest and recovery with the need for social interaction. Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional about any concerns you have regarding isolation or loneliness.

25. Can I work while undergoing chemotherapy?

Some people can work full-time, while others may need to reduce their hours or take time off. We encourage you to audit your feelings and energy level after every chemo and decide what suits you. It is essential to discuss balancing your schedule with treatment with your stakeholders.

Over a thousand cancer patients have received chemotherapy at Pearl Oncology Specialist Hospital. Our skilled Clinical Oncologists, oncology nurses, and pharmacy team prescribe, procure, prepare, mix safely in our biosafety cabinets, and administer humanely to our patients in our 6-chair chemo suite or on the wards.