

Chemotherapy in the Hospital - What to Expect

Before You Come to the Hospital

Before or while you are admitted for treatment, you may get a central venous catheter (CVC, PICC or port). This line is used to give medicines, fluids or blood products. This line lessens the need for many needle sticks into your vein. The catheter is inserted into your arm or under your collarbone by a medical professional and remains in place for your treatment duration.

You and your caregiver will learn how to care for the catheter. Depending on the type of catheter, class attendance may be required. Ask for a schedule of class days, times and locations.

You will receive a call from the Patient Logistics Center on your planned admission date. Please arrive at the hospital within 3 hours of being notified that your room is ready. Personal electric fans, blankets, appliances, and fresh flowers are not permitted in the Oncology Unit during your stay.

While You Are in the Hospital

Your health care team will take care of you. As part of that care, they may order more tests such as blood tests or imaging to help design the best treatment for you. Your health care team will discuss your treatment plan with you while you are in the hospital.

Your Health Care Team

Many people care for you. This team may include a:

- Doctor in charge of your inpatient stay
- Oncology Resource Nurse
- Pharmacist
- Nurse practitioner or physician assistant
- Nurse
- Dietitian
- Social work counselor
- Case manager navigator
- Physical therapist
- Occupational therapist
- Certified nursing assistant

The doctors take turns caring for patients in the hospital. Because of this, your clinic doctor may or may not manage your care while you are in the hospital. Your clinic doctor is still in charge of your overall treatment plan. The doctors communicate with each other about your treatment plan. The inpatient doctor treats your day-to-day needs while you are in the hospital.

Side Effects

Some patients have side effects from chemotherapy. To prepare for this, your doctor will order medicines to help you feel better. Not all patients have side effects. Tell your health care team if you have any problems. Let your team know if you have:

- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Heartburn
- Nausea (upset stomach) or vomiting
- Acid reflux
- Problems sleeping
- Pain
- Mouth sores
- Fever or chills
- Rash
- Injection or infusion site reactions

Daily Routine

During your hospital stay, your vital signs will be frequently monitored, including during night hours. Vital signs are pulse, breathing rate, temperature, and blood pressure. Cardiac monitoring may be required. For safety reasons, fall precautions such as a bed and/or chair alarm may be implemented.

Early in the morning, a nursing assistant may take your weight. A nurse or lab technician may draw blood. Nurses will check on you and administer medications throughout the day and night. Blood transfusions might be necessary. Medications may be administered intravenously, by mouth, or by injection.

Your inpatient doctor may consult other specialists to meet with you. For instance, a dietitian may be consulted to discuss your dietary habits. The healthcare team usually sees all inpatients during the day. It is recommended to write down any questions you have for your team.

Discharge From the Hospital


To get ready to leave the hospital, you will meet with members of the health care team. Some things your team may do include:

- Check to make sure you or your caregiver have been taught how to care for your CVC or port at home, if needed.
- Discuss when you may resume your normal daily activities.
- Review your outpatient appointments.
- Provide a written schedule of appointments and instructions for follow-up care.
- Talk with you about any medicines or supplies you will need after discharge.
- Provide new prescriptions or orders, if needed.

Other Information After Discharge

Contact your clinic health care team if you have urgent problems. If you live out-of-town, contact your local doctor. They may call your MD Anderson doctor as needed.

Go to the nearest hospital emergency center if you have any of these symptoms:

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- Fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher, chills or sweating. If you have any of these symptoms, talk with your health care team before you take any medicine to lower the fever. **Do not** wait for your temperature to increase.
 - Shortness of breath
 - Chest pain
 - Severe abdominal pain
 - Severe diarrhea
 - Severe nausea, vomiting or if you cannot keep food, water or medicine in your stomach
 - Pain not relieved by medicine or pain that gets worse over time
 - Seizures
 - Change in level of awareness or alertness

You may be told to avoid large crowds and people who are sick. Wash your hands often, especially after you use the bathroom and before you prepare and eat food.