Chemotherapy

What is chemotherapy?
Chemotherapy is a type of cancer treatment that uses drugs to stop fast growing cells, such as cancer cells, from dividing and making new cells. Chemotherapy drugs can also stop fast growing healthy cells from dividing. Damage to the healthy cells may cause some side effects such as hair loss, nausea, and a decrease in white blood cells. These side effects often get better or go away after you complete treatment.

For more information about cancer, chemotherapy, side effects or how to care for yourself during treatment, refer to your Chemotherapy and You book, or ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

How is chemotherapy given?
Chemotherapy may be given in many ways. The most common are intravenously (IV) or taken by mouth.

- Intravenous medicines are given directly into your blood stream through a tube (IV) placed into your arm or chest. These medicines are given by a nurse trained to give chemotherapy.
- Chemotherapy medicines taken by mouth are tablets or capsules. You will be given information about the medicine when it is prescribed by your doctor.
- Chemotherapy can be given in “cycles.” A cycle includes the day(s) chemotherapy is given and the time in between treatments. Since chemotherapy attacks fast-growing cells, your body will need time to rebuild healthy cells after each treatment.
- Chemotherapy can be given as a single drug or as a combination of two or more drugs.
- Drugs given in combination work to stop fast growing cancer cells in different ways. Both drugs work to stop fast growing cancer cells from dividing and making new cells, but they attack the cancer cells differently.
What is Targeted Cancer Therapy?
Targeted cancer therapies are different than chemotherapy. These drugs or substances work on specific cancer cells. Chemotherapy and targeted cancer therapy may be given together to stop cancer growth.

Is there anything else I should know about treatment?
- Some medicines may cause problems if taken with your chemotherapy. Tell your doctor what medicines/pills you are taking, including:
  - Medicines prescribed by any of your doctors.
  - Herbs
  - Vitamins
  - Over-the-counter medicines
- You will receive information about each chemotherapy drug you are given.
- You may have blood drawn before your treatment.
- Treatment may make it harder for your body to fight infections. Wash your hands often and avoid people who are sick.
- You should drink 8 to 10 eight-ounce glasses of non-caffeinated fluid each day throughout your treatment. It is important for you to keep hydrated while you are receiving chemotherapy. However, if you have been told to limit fluids, check with your doctor about how much you can drink.
- Chemotherapy drugs can cause nausea. You will be given a prescription for medicine to take before your chemotherapy to help prevent nausea or vomiting. Eating a number of small meals during the day may help reduce nausea.
- **Women should not get pregnant and should use a barrier method of birth control while receiving chemotherapy.**
- **Men receiving chemotherapy should use a barrier method of birth control (condom) when having sex.**
- This treatment may affect your ability to have children. Talk to your doctor before getting chemotherapy if you are planning to have children in the future.

For more information on Chemotherapy, we encourage you to visit our video library at [http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos](http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos).