

Ototoxicity

What is ototoxicity?

Medicines that may damage your auditory system (your sense of hearing) are called **ototoxic**. Ototoxic medicines can damage the sensory cells in your inner ear. This may lead to hearing loss and tinnitus (buzzing or ringing in your ears). Symptoms may show up suddenly or slowly get worse over time.

If your cancer treatment includes any ototoxic chemotherapy, your doctor may refer you to an **audiologist** to check your hearing. An audiologist is a member of the health care team who tests hearing.

What does an audiologist do?

An audiologist will test your hearing before you start chemotherapy, every few weeks during your treatments and after your chemotherapy is done. Your audiologist will ask you about any changes with your hearing or new or worsening tinnitus. If you have any changes, the audiologist will let your cancer doctor know.

How can I protect my hearing?

Ototoxic chemotherapy may make your ears more sensitive to damage from loud sounds. It is important that you try to stay away from loud sounds while you are getting ototoxic chemotherapy. If you are unable to stay away from loud sounds, you should use earplugs or earmuffs to protect your hearing. It is important to take steps to protect your hearing for 1 year after you have finished chemotherapy.

Call your doctor if you have sudden, major hearing loss or tinnitus that is bothersome and does not go away.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.