



Chemotherapy Treatment

Key points



Chemotherapy is the treatment of cancer with drugs developed to kill specific cancers. Different drugs or combinations of drugs are used in different cancers. Chemotherapy may be given as a tablet, but more commonly is given directly into a vein.

Why a patient would be given chemotherapy in a lung cancer setting:

If there is a known spread of the cancer or there is a high chance there would be spread of the cancer, even though it does not yet show on imagery.

- People may have chemotherapy to treat their cancer. Your treatment team may give you chemotherapy to shrink tumours.
- It cleans away cancer cells that are left after other treatments, such as surgery.
- It can relieve symptoms and side effects of cancer and other cancer treatments.
- Chemotherapy kills normal, healthy cells too, which causes side effects.

Sometimes several drugs are given at the same time. Lung cancer chemotherapy can be the main type of treatment, or it can be used along with surgery and/or radiation treatment. Lung cancer chemotherapy can be used to shrink the tumour before another treatment. It is also used to kill any cancer cells that still there after another treatment. It may also be used in later stages of the cancer to relieve cancer symptoms.

Most chemotherapy is taken as a pill or given by drip (intravenous (IV) line). Chemotherapy treatment for lung cancer is given in cycles. Each treatment cycle is followed by a period of time to get over it.

Chemotherapy may temporarily reduce the white cells that fight infection so will be recycled when the blood count has recovered. For example, this may mean that a chemotherapy combination is recycled every three weeks.

Chemotherapy can damage normal cells and therefore cause side effects, but normal cells recover better than cancer cells do.

Possible side effects of chemotherapy



- Tiredness
- Nausea (feeling sick)
- Infection
- Constipation/diarrhoea
- Easy bruising
- Sore mouth
- Anaemia – decrease in red blood cells
- Hair loss – not everyone will experience hair loss

Discuss your concerns and possible side effects with your doctor before chemotherapy starts and each time you see the chemotherapy team during treatment.



Related content

[American Lung Association \(2016\) "What Are The Symptoms of Lung Cancer?"](#)

[European Lung Foundation \(2016\) "Lung Cancer"](#)

[Lung Foundation Australia \(2012\) "Better Living with Lung Cancer: A Patient Guide"](#)

About Lung Foundation New Zealand

Lung Foundation New Zealand is a non-government organisation dedicated to promoting healthy lungs and early detection of lung disease (including lung cancer, New Zealand's biggest cancer killer). The Lung Foundation is devoted to supporting people affected by lung disease and provides a voice for patients and their families.

Lung Foundation New Zealand advocates on a range of issues, including access to more effective funded treatments, an increase in research funding and a commitment to making Aotearoa a smoke free nation by 2025.

Support us

Lung Foundation New Zealand is an independent organisation and is reliant on support from fundraising events, donations and bequests. This resource has been produced as the result of generous support provided by members of the public.

If you or a member of your family would like to support our work we would love to hear from you. Together we can save lives by increasing awareness about lung health and early detection of lung disease. Please visit our website www.lungfoundation.org.nz or contact Philip Hope, CEO on (+64) 021 959 450 or philip.hope@lungfoundation.org.nz

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Expert Review Policy: Our information was checked for accuracy and clarity by cancer specialists. This resource has been approved by Medical Director & Associate Professor of Oncology, Chris Atkinson of Christchurch; assisted by Dr Greg Frazer, Respiratory Physician, Christchurch Hospital; Catherine Smith, Clinical Nurse Specialist - Lung Cancer, Christchurch Hospital; and Anne Fraser, Oncology Nurse Practitioner, Auckland City Hospital. Lung Foundation New Zealand writes in plain English. We review our information every two years so it is kept up to date.

Thanks to the American Lung Association and the European Lung Foundation for allowing us to adapt their resources for our New Zealand readers. This information sheet is one in a series produced by Lung Foundation New Zealand on lung disease, its treatment and related issues and is correct at time of print. It is designed to be used as a guide only; it is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical treatment. Please consult your family doctor or specialist if you have further questions relating to this information.