

Cyclophosphamide

The possible benefits of treatment vary; for some people this chemotherapy may reduce the risk of the cancer coming back, for others it may control the cancer and its symptoms. Your doctor will explain to you whether you will receive chemotherapy or another type of treatment, or a combination of both. Your doctor or nurse will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment. You will find it useful to refer to the booklet 'Chemotherapy, a guide' which gives general information on chemotherapy and side effects.

Your treatment

Your doctor has prescribed for you a treatment with cyclophosphamide.

Cyclophosphamide may be given in tablet form or as an injection.

Steroid tablets may also be prescribed with cyclophosphamide tablets.

Alongside your chemotherapy, you will be given other medications to prevent side effects. Your clinical team will discuss this with you.

This treatment can have serious or possibly life-threatening side effects. It is very important that you report side effects straight away. Don't delay, if you feel unwell, please ring The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658**. The lines are open 24 hours a day.

• Increased risk of serious infection

You are vulnerable to infection while you are having chemotherapy. Minor infections can become life-threatening in a matter of hours if left untreated. Symptoms of infection include fever, shivering, sweats, sore throat, diarrhoea, discomfort when you pass urine, cough or breathlessness. We recommend that you use a digital thermometer so you can check your temperature. You can buy one from your local chemist.

If your temperature is 37.5°C or above, or below 36°C or you have symptoms of an infection, contact The Christie Hotline straight away.



Flu vaccinations

Is it alright for me to have a flu jab during the time I'm having chemotherapy?

It's safe to have a flu jab, but depending on the sort of chemotherapy you have had, it may not give quite as much protection against infection as usual. Some patients may need two vaccinations. However, if you're thinking of having any other vaccinations, do check with your Christie doctor first, because some vaccines should be avoided.

Possible side effects

Chemotherapy can cause many different side effects. Some are more likely to occur than others. Everyone is different and not everyone gets all the side effects. Most side effects are usually temporary, but in some rare cases they can be life-threatening. It is important to tell your hospital doctor or nurse about any side effects so they can be monitored and, where possible, treated.

Common side effects (more than 1 in 10)

• Nausea and vomiting

Cyclophosphamide can cause nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick). This may occur immediately after the chemotherapy or up to 4 to 5 days later. You will be given anti-sickness drugs before and during your chemotherapy drip and tablets to take afterwards. You will also be given additional anti-sickness medication to take if you need it. If you still feel sick, please contact your GP, hospital doctor or specialist nurse as other types of anti-sickness medication may be prescribed for you.

• Anaemia (low number of red blood cells)

While having this treatment you may become anaemic. This may make you feel tired and breathless. Let your doctor or nurse know if these symptoms are a problem. You may need a blood transfusion.

• Bruising or bleeding

This treatment can reduce the production of platelets which help the blood clot. Tell your doctor if you have any unexplained bruising or bleeding, such as nosebleeds, bloodspots or rashes on the skin, and bleeding gums. You may need a platelet transfusion.

• Lethargy

Some chemotherapy may make you feel tired and lacking in energy. It can be frustrating when you feel unable to cope with routine tasks. If you do feel tired, take rest and get help with household chores. If necessary, take time off work. Gentle exercise such as walking can be beneficial.

• Irritation of the bladder

Cyclophosphamide may irritate your bladder. It is important to drink as much fluid as you can (up to two litres a day) on the days you have the cyclophosphamide and the day afterwards to help prevent this. Tell your doctor if you have any discomfort when you pass urine. You may also be given a drug (mesna) to reduce the risk of bladder irritation. This may be given intravenously or as tablets. If you have been given it as tablets, it is vital that you take them.

• Steroid side effects

Your **dexamethasone tablets** should be taken with food as they may cause indigestion. They may also increase your appetite. It is better to take them earlier in the day, for example, with breakfast and lunch, since they can make you feel more alert and prevent sleep.

These dexamethasone tablets can **alter your mood** causing you to feel low, irritable or agitated. Please tell the doctor at your next clinic visit if this is a problem.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

• Sore mouth (Warning!)

Your mouth may become sore or dry, or you may notice small mouth ulcers during this treatment. Drinking plenty of fluids and cleaning your teeth regularly and gently with a soft toothbrush can

help to reduce the risk of this happening. We can prescribe a mouthwash for you to use during treatment. You can dilute this with water if your mouth is sore. Ask your doctor or nurse for further advice. There is also general mouth care information in the chemotherapy booklet. If you continue to have a sore mouth, please contact The Christie Hotline.

Occasionally during treatment you may experience a strange taste sometimes described as metallic or bitter. A strongly flavoured sweet or mint will help to disguise this.

• **Diarrhoea (Warning!)**

If this becomes a problem while you are having treatment, anti-diarrhoea tablets can be bought from a pharmacy or prescribed by your GP for a temporary period until this is resolved. If the problem persists contact this hospital. If you develop severe diarrhoea it is important to contact The Christie straight away as this may be a sign of a serious infection. Don't delay!

Rare side effects (less than 1 in 100)

• **Hair thinning**

Total hair loss (alopecia) is very unlikely unless you have high doses of cyclophosphamide although some hair loss may occur during treatment, including body and facial hair. It is advisable to avoid perms, colours, use of hot brushes and vigorous frequent washing that could increase hair loss. Please remember that this is a temporary side effect and your hair will grow back when your treatment is completed. Very rarely, hair loss may be permanent.

The cancer information centre offers a coping with hair loss service to all patients where support, information and advice will be given. Drop in, contact **0161 446 8100** or email **the-christie.informationcentre@nhs.net** Information about the wig service can also be found here and vouchers for wigs can also be obtained for eligible patients. The wig room provides a drop in service, please see The Christie leaflet 'The wig fitting service' for further information.

The Maggie's Centre runs a Talking Heads hair loss support workshop for anyone who is anticipating or experiencing hair loss (both men and women). These sessions cover the practicalities of hair loss as well as offering support with its emotional impact. Contact Maggie's on **0161 641 4848** or email **manchester@maggiescentres.org**.

• **Skin colouring**

Sometimes as a result of the chemotherapy, your skin may appear darker in colour or lightly tanned, especially around the joints. This is known as hyperpigmentation. The skin will return to normal when the treatment is finished. Asian and African-Caribbean people may develop noticeable light patches on their skin.

Serious and potentially life threatening side effects

In a small proportion of patients chemotherapy can result in very severe side effects which may rarely result in death. The team caring for you will discuss the risk of these side effects with you.

Sex, contraception and fertility

Protecting your partner and contraception We recommend that you or your partner use a condom during sexual intercourse while you are having the course of chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is dangerous to unborn babies and this will also protect you and your partner from any chemotherapy drugs that may be present in semen and in the vagina. If you suspect that you may be pregnant please tell your doctor immediately.

Fertility This chemotherapy may affect your ability to have children. Your doctor or nurse should have discussed this with you. If not, please ask them before you start treatment.

Late side effects

Some side effects may become evident only after a number of years. In reaching any decision with you about treatment, the potential benefit you receive from treatment will be weighed against the risks of serious long term side effects to the heart, lungs, kidneys and bone marrow. With some drugs there is also a small but definite risk of developing another cancer. If any of these problems specifically applies to you, the doctor will discuss these with you and note this on your consent form.

Contacts

If you have any general questions or concerns about your treatment, please ring the area where you are having treatment:

Neuro-oncology clinical nurse specialist - **0161 446 8441**

Your consultant's secretary:

Dr McBain - **0161 918 7008**

Dr Borst /Dr Milanovic - **0161 446 3362**

Dr Colaco/Dr Whitfield/Dr Kennedy - **0161 918 7197**

Administration enquiries - **0161 918 7606/7610**

Chemotherapy nurse - **0161 918 7171**

For advice ring The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658** (24 hours)

Your consultant is:

Your hospital number is:

Your key worker is:

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If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week