

Going home after your chemotherapy

Although your blood count has recovered from the chemotherapy you have just had, you are still at risk of getting an infection. There are a few simple things you can do once you leave hospital to reduce this risk.

Going home after a long time in hospital can leave you feeling very vulnerable, so it is important that we continue to help you to feel safe at home. This information sheet offers general advice. Please call The Royal Marsden (contact details on page 4) if you have any questions.

Contact with other people when you go home

If you come into contact with anyone who has an infection such as shingles, chicken pox or measles, you must let us know as soon as possible. If you have young children at nursery, playgroup or school, ask the nursery leader or head teacher to let you know if there are any cases of infectious disease at the school. You do not need to keep your children at home but just be more aware of the symptoms of the infection, so that if your children develop these symptoms you can ask us for advice.

It is good to have friends to come and visit you but ask them to stay away if they have colds, flu or diarrhoea and sickness. If any family members at home develop coughs, colds or stomach upsets, then remind everyone to make sure they wash their hands properly with soap and warm water. You should avoid using the same towel as them. Ask them to cover their mouth or nose when coughing or sneezing and to use tissues.

Please take care when changing babies' nappies and make sure that you wash your hands thoroughly. If any children are having vaccinations, please check with your clinical nurse specialist / keyworker about any precautions you may need to take.

Chemotherapy could affect your sex life. You may experience reduced desire for sexual activity or feel too tired. This will return to normal with time. It is advisable to use a condom during sex to reduce the risk of infection. If you or your partner develop a cold sore or infected mouth ulcers, you should avoid kissing and inform your team. Low platelets could cause bleeding during sex, please inform the team if this happens.

Contact with animals at home

We do not advise you to have any new pets during this time. However, pets you already have will be fine to stay at home with you.



- If your pet becomes unwell, seek advice from your vet as soon as possible
- You should not change litter trays or clean up after any pet – if possible, leave it to others
- If you have no choice, then be very careful to wash your hands thoroughly afterwards
- Do not encourage pets to lick your face or sleep on your bed as this can lead to an infection
- If you keep caged birds such as budgerigars, be very careful when cleaning out the cage or again, if possible, ask someone to do it for you.

Going out

It is normal to feel quite tired and lethargic after chemotherapy. It often takes time to adjust to being at home when you have been in hospital. To try to reduce the risk of infection, it is advisable to avoid crowded places, people with coughs, colds or viruses and public transport. You can still go out but try and visit shops, bars and restaurants when they are likely to be less busy.

Exercising

Try to walk and take other gentle exercise. Take care not to overdo it. When you have had chemotherapy you can become very tired (fatigued). If you decide to go for a walk, time yourself for five minutes each way to begin with and take it slowly. It is advisable to take someone with you on your walks, in case you feel tired or unwell.

Gardening

If you enjoy gardening, a little light work on a warm dry day is fine. You should avoid bright sunshine. It is advisable to use sun protection such as wearing a hat and using sun cream with a high sun protection factor (SPF). Do not handle homemade compost or decaying leaves as these may contain fungal spores which can give you a chest, ear or sinus infection. Wear gloves when gardening to avoid cuts. Make sure you wash your hands when you finish gardening. You can have fresh flowers at home but remember to change the water frequently.

Drinking

You should continue to drink at least two litres of water daily when you go home. **Do not** use bottled water as it is not chlorinated. Tap or filtered water is fine. Alcohol can be taken in moderate amounts. Excessive drinking will make you dehydrated and feel unwell.

Eating

It is sensible to take precautions with food, such as ensuring all food is consumed within the 'use by' date and adhering to good hygiene practice when preparing food. This includes washing your hands before preparing food and after touching raw meats, also making sure knives and chopping boards are cleaned thoroughly.

Avoid the foods below as they contain potentially harmful bacteria:

- Unpasteurised dairy products including mould ripened and blue veined cheeses, such as brie, camembert or stilton



- Raw and runny eggs (fresh, well-cooked lion marked eggs are safe to eat)
- Sushi and sashimi
- Pâté
- Reheated rice (rice should always be prepared to eat straight away).

Make sure fruit and vegetables are washed thoroughly before eating. If you are going out for a meal or having a take-away, make sure you choose a place with a good reputation and hygiene rating.

Follow the food hygiene code:

- Make sure that food is always in date
- Cook all food thoroughly
- Never reheat food more than once
- Always wash your hands before handling food
- Store cooked and uncooked food separately in the refrigerator.

Central Venous Access Devices (CVAD)

If you are going home with a CVAD (such as a PICC line, Hickman line, LTS line or porthacath) it is important that you look at your skin at the exit site daily for any signs of infection (redness, swelling, tenderness, oozing). If you experience any of these, you must contact the hospital immediately.

You must not go swimming either in the sea or swimming pool when you have a CVAD. The dressing which is placed over the catheter does not need to be changed every day and will protect the entry site during your daily shower. If you notice any bleeding or wetness from your shower under the protective covering, you may change the dressing. Always remember to wash your hands first.

The CVAD will need to be cleaned and re-dressed once a week. Please ensure that you have a weekly appointment on Bud Flanagan Outpatients for this.

Medication

We will give you medicines to take home. The ward nurse will explain further and you will have the opportunity to ask questions about when to take them and the dosage you need. You **must** follow the instructions on your medicines carefully. It is important that you do not miss out any of your treatment, even when you are feeling better. You should not stop any medication without checking with the hospital first. If you have any concerns, you can call your clinical nurse specialist or the ward for advice.

Please check your medicine bottle carefully as some medications are given as different dosages and it is important that you receive the correct dose.



What to do if you feel unwell

If you feel unwell, you will need to take your temperature. If your temperature goes to 37.8°C or above, you must contact the hospital straight away. **Do not take any paracetamol to bring your temperature down until you have spoken to a doctor or nurse at the hospital.**

Sometimes you can have an infection without having a temperature, so if you feel unwell in any other way, such as rigor (shivering) without a high temperature, you should still call.

If you are unwell between 9am and 4pm, Monday to Friday, please call your clinical nurse specialist.

If your nurse does not answer the phone or you are contacting us out of hours or during the weekend, please contact The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline (available 24 hours per day).

Please do not come to the hospital without contacting us first.

When you are discharged, you will be given a yellow Chemotherapy Alert Card. If you are told to go to your local hospital, you must go to the accident and emergency department straight away. Please present this card on arrival to the receptionist. This explains that you are a patient who is on or who has had chemotherapy treatment and as such you should be treated as a priority.

If you have to be admitted to another hospital, please let us know the next day. Your clinical nurse specialist will then be able to speak with the admitting hospital about your condition and relay information to your consultant at The Royal Marsden.

Attending the Outpatient Department

When you come to book in for your outpatient appointments, please tell the receptionist if you have an unexplained problem, such as a rash or if you have any symptoms of a cold or cough or diarrhoea. We may need to separate you from other patients until we have identified the cause. Please call us if you have any questions or concerns.

Contact details

Clinical Nurse Specialist, Leukaemia 020 8661 3518

Clinical Nurse Specialist, Myeloma 020 8661 3657

Clinical Nurse Specialist, Lymphoma 020 8661 3987

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

