

Tips and hints for keeping well during chemotherapy treatment

Chemotherapy can affect the immune system and this means you are at greater risk of picking up an infection. This information will help you to keep safe and well while you are having chemotherapy treatment.

You do not have to stay at home and avoid family and friends. If you feel well enough, you can continue to work or carry out your normal activities. You may find it helpful to talk to your nurse specialist or key worker if you have any concerns about your job. Regular activity is important as it can improve quality of life and help with cancer-related fatigue. It is not always possible or necessary to avoid crowded public places. However, travelling on buses and trains during peak times may increase your risk of infection.

We would advise you to have an annual flu jab. Please check with your nurse specialist or key worker, the best time to have this. If you are planning a trip abroad, it is a good idea to discuss with your nurse specialist or key worker first.

Neutropenic sepsis is a serious infection that must be treated as soon as possible. It is important that you watch out for any signs of infection. Please ensure you have a thermometer at home. A normal temperature is between 36°C to 37.2°C. If your temperature goes above 38°C or below 36°C or you develop any of the following, please call The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline immediately for advice. The number can be found on the back of your yellow card.

The ROYAL MARSDEN
NHS Foundation Trust

CHEMOTHERAPY ALERT CARD

Contact The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline **URGENTLY** (number on reverse of card) if you feel unwell or develop:

- temperature of above 38° C or below 36° C or feeling generally unwell
- shivering or chills
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- new onset diarrhoea
- gum/nose bleeds or unusual bruising
- mouth ulcers that stop you eating or drinking
- persistent vomiting

Immediate A&E/hospital attendance may be required

Show this card if you attend A&E.



Reducing your risk of infection

- These are some steps to follow to reduce your risk of picking up an infection
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. In particular, after using the toilet, sneezing, handling raw food, before eating, after touching pets or when handling rubbish and dirty washing
- Wash clothes and bed linen regularly. Change your bathroom and kitchen hand towels frequently
- Take a daily bath or shower if possible and do not share your towels or flannels
- It is advisable to avoid people who have sore throats, colds, flu, diarrhoea and vomiting or other contagious illnesses for example, chicken pox
- It is best to avoid handling animal waste such as litter trays
- If you share office equipment, it is advisable to wipe these over with anti-bacterial wipes, especially if your colleagues have a cold
- Take care not to graze or cut your skin, if you do, clean the area with warm water and apply a sterile dressing or waterproof plaster
- It is not advisable to have any dental work done while you are receiving treatment without discussing this first with your nurse specialist, keyworker or doctor due to risk of infection
- Keep your mouth clean and drink plenty of fluids. Clean your teeth using a soft toothbrush to reduce potential trauma to the gums and allow bacteria to enter the blood stream.

Food safety

Very occasionally some patients may need to avoid certain foods or follow a special diet. Your nurse or doctor will advise you if this is necessary and provide you with specific written information. Generally, we suggest you try to eat a varied, healthy balanced diet. This is in accordance with Food Standards Agency (www.food.gov.uk) and NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk/livewell).

- Always clean hands, utensils, chopping boards and surfaces with hot soapy water
- When preparing food, dry your hands on kitchen paper after washing them
- Cook ready meals for the recommended time and to the recommended temperature on the packaging
- Separate raw, cooked and ready-to-eat foods when shopping, preparing or storing foods in the fridge
- Refrigerate perishable food promptly and defrost frozen foods properly
- Fruit, vegetables and salad ingredients must be washed
- Follow storage instructions on the label and always use food before the use by date.

Contact details

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

