

# Chemotherapy

## What is chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy uses medicines to treat cancer. It's also called "chemo". Chemo works in your whole body by travelling through your blood to try to destroy the cancer. There are different types of chemo to treat the different types of cancer.

## Why do I need chemo?

Doctors use chemo medicines to destroy the cancer because your body cannot "fix" cancer by itself. Chemo medicines may help to:

- cure the cancer
- stop the cancer from getting bigger or spreading
- shrink the size of the cancer
- stop some pain and other problems caused by the cancer.

## How do I have chemo?

There are different ways to have chemo. The most common way uses a needle that puts the medicine straight into your blood (see picture). You will have chemo for a certain time (maybe one day, a few days or a week). You will then have a break for 1–4 weeks, and then have treatment again. This is called a cycle. You may need several cycles to treat the cancer.

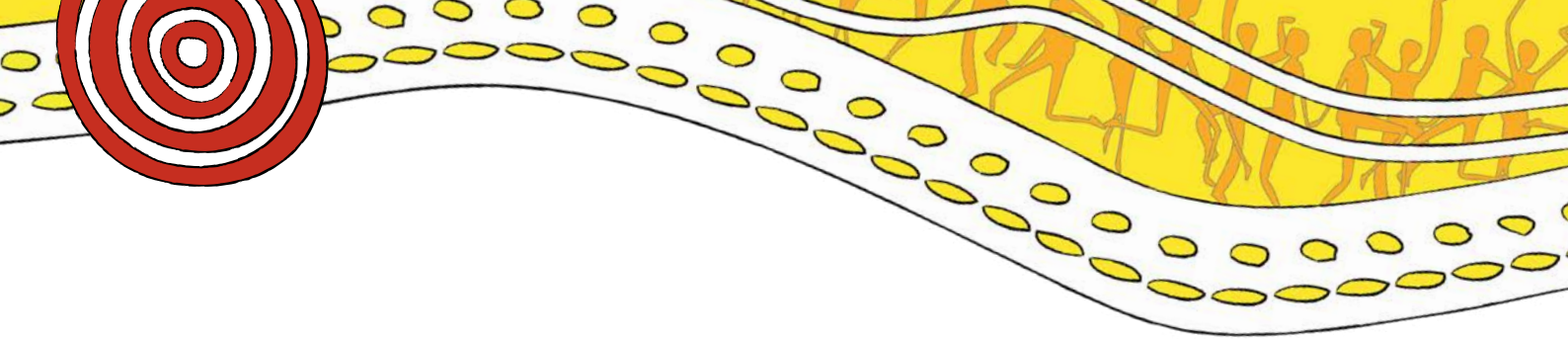
Other ways to have chemo include swallowing tablets or drinking liquid medicine. You may have to take this once or twice a day for a certain time.

## Where do I go to get chemo?

You may have chemo in a hospital, treatment centre or at home. It will depend on the type of cancer you have and the type of chemo used.

It's important to go to all of your chemo sessions. If you need help getting to appointments, tell your doctor, Aboriginal Health Service or Worker or call Cancer Council on 13 11 20.





## How long will I have chemo?

Your chemo doctor (called a medical oncologist) will tell you how long you should have chemo. This will depend on:

- the type of cancer you have
- the type of medicine your doctor gives you
- how you feel when you're getting chemo.

## How will the chemo affect my body?

Chemo medicines are really strong so they can destroy the cancer in your body. Sometimes these medicines can affect how you look and feel (called side effects). Many side effects can be treated, and often go away after treatment stops. Talk to your doctor or Aboriginal Health Worker if you have any worries about treatment or side effects. Most people don't get all the side effects.

### Your doctor will tell you what to expect, but you may:

- feel a little tired or very tired (fatigue)
- have nausea (feel sick) and vomit (spew)
- have a sore mouth and throat (e.g. ulcers or thrush)
- lose hair from your head and parts of your body
- have some pain or numbness or tingling
- have hard poos that are difficult to pass (constipation) or watery poos (diarrhoea)
- be more likely to get infections.

Some women may have women's issues.



When you are having chemo, check your temperature every day or if you feel sick. Call the hospital or treatment centre if you have a temperature of 38°C or higher.

## More information

- Call Cancer Council 13 11 20
- Visit [aboriginal.cancercouncil.com.au](http://aboriginal.cancercouncil.com.au)
- Visit [menzies.edu.au/cancer](http://menzies.edu.au/cancer)
- Ask your local Aboriginal Health Service



Cancer Council NSW has adapted this fact sheet from a Menzies School of Health Research resource that was developed in consultation with a clinical advisory group and an Indigenous consultation group. It has been reviewed by cancer experts and Aboriginal people with an experience of cancer.

The design features elements from the artwork *Healing Journey* by Carissa Paglino. Carissa was born and raised in Awabakal country (Newcastle) and is a descendant of the Wanaruah people from the Upper Hunter Valley in NSW. Cancer Council NSW's respect symbol (below) was designed by Marcus Lee, a descendant of the Karajarri people.



Cancer Council NSW acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past and present.

