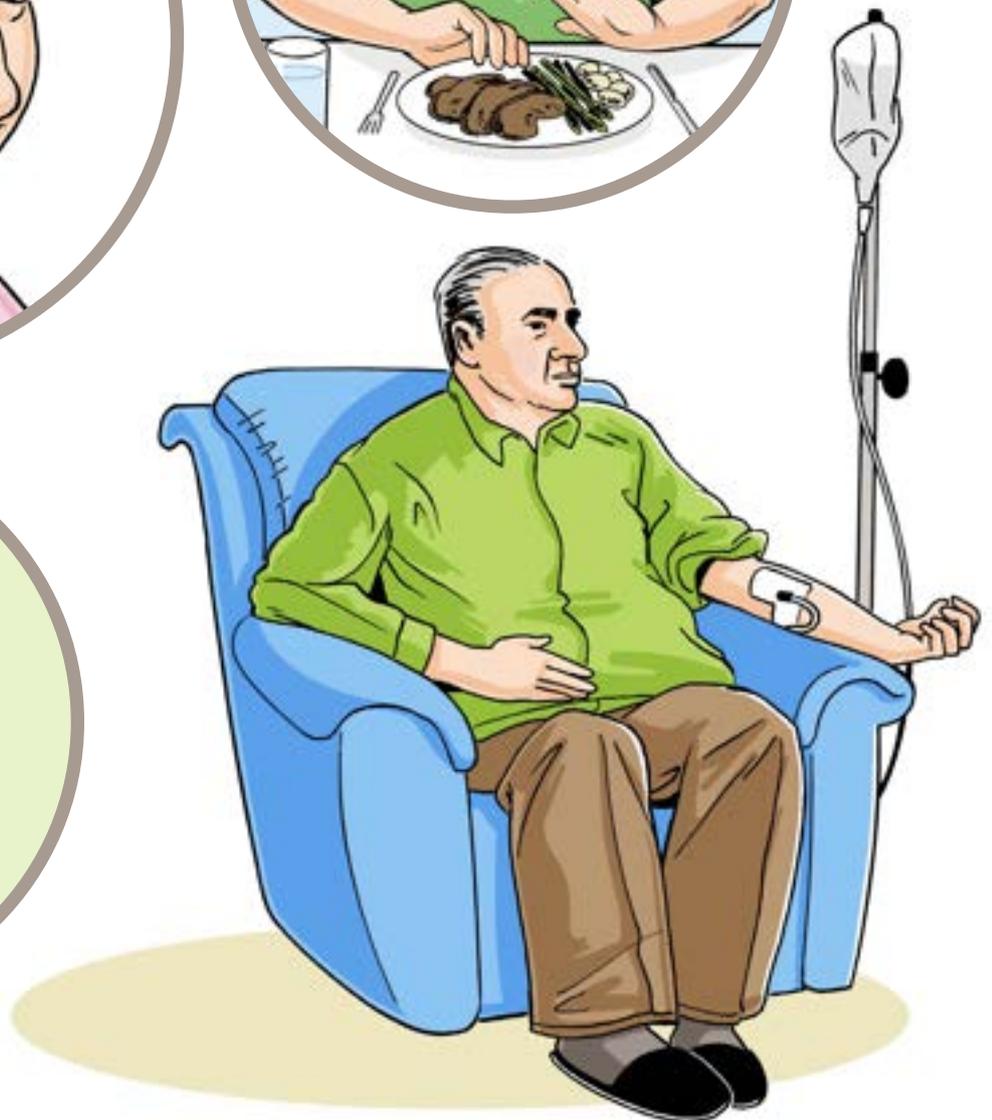


In partnership with

**MACMILLAN**  
CANCER SUPPORT

easy  
read

# Side effects from chemotherapy





# About this easy read booklet



This booklet is about side effects from chemotherapy.



You can learn about what will happen to your body during chemotherapy.

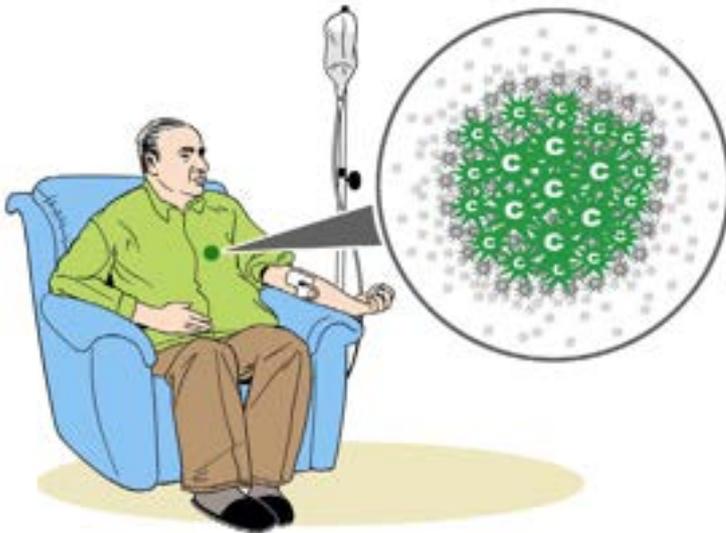


If you are worried about your health, you should talk to a doctor or nurse.



# Side effects from chemotherapy

Some people worry about having **chemotherapy** because it can cause **side effects**. These are unwanted effects caused by having treatment like tiredness or feeling sick.



**Chemotherapy** is a type of treatment where you are given drugs to help kill cancer cells in your body.



Your doctor or nurse can tell you about what they think will happen if you choose not to have chemotherapy.



You can then decide if you want to have the treatment or not.



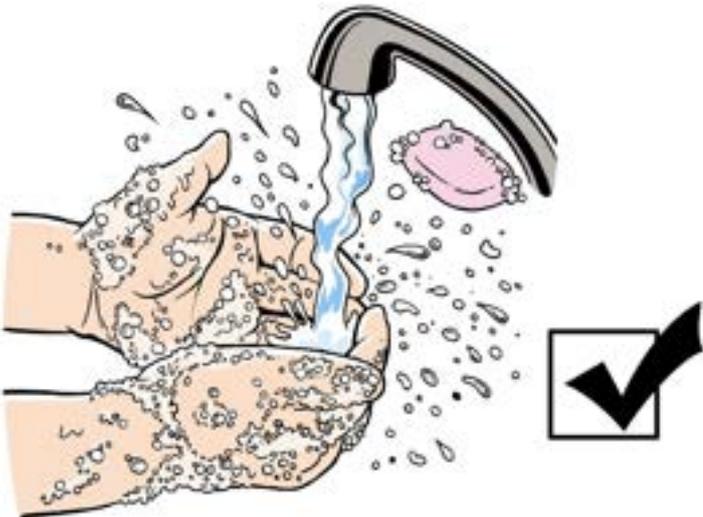
# Infection



When you are having chemotherapy you might get **infections** more easily, like a cold or flu.



An **infection** is when germs attack your body. Infections might make you feel unwell, shivery or very hot.



There are things you can do that may stop you getting an infection:

- wash your hands often



- stay away from people who have colds or other illnesses you can catch



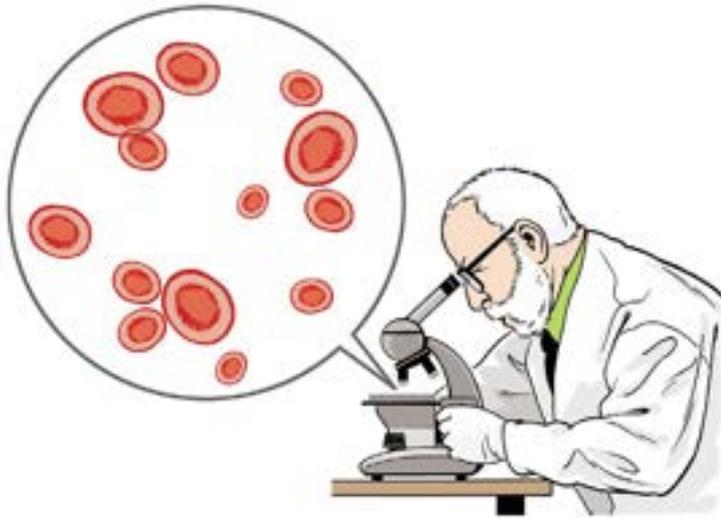
- stay away from places with lots of people.



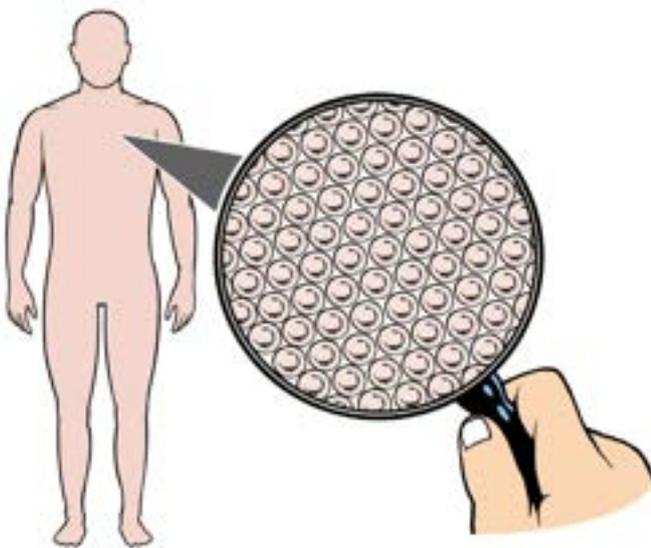
It is very important to tell your doctor if you feel hot and ill so they can give you medicine.



# Anaemia



**Anaemia** can happen when your blood doesn't have enough red blood **cells** in it.



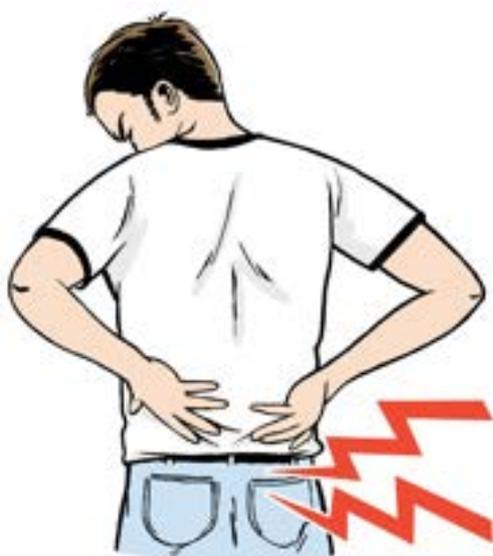
**Cells** are the tiny building blocks that make up people's bodies.



Anaemia can make you feel very tired and out of breath.



It can make you feel dizzy.



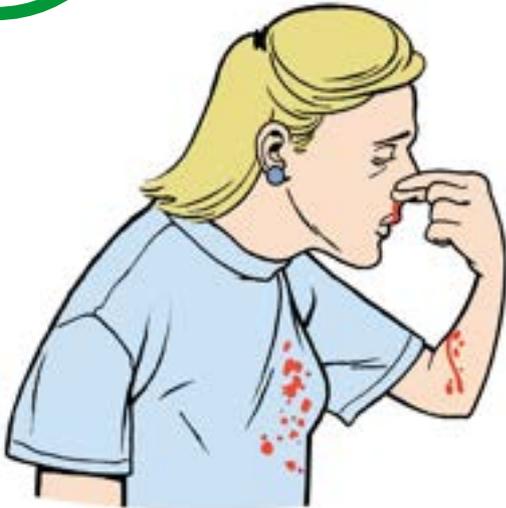
It can also make your joints and muscles ache.



Your doctor can treat you for anaemia.



# Bleeding and bruising



You may have nosebleeds or bleeding gums.



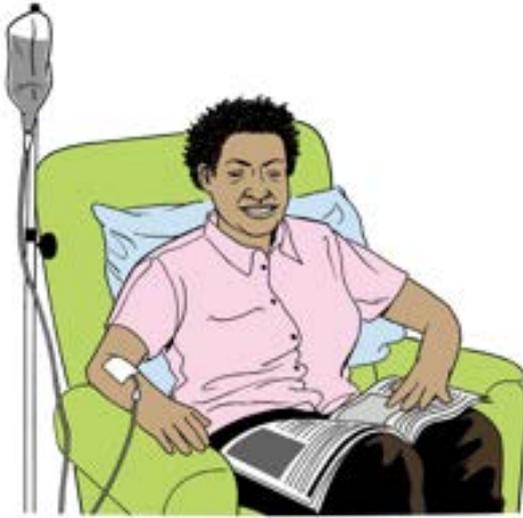
You may have bruises on your body and not know why.



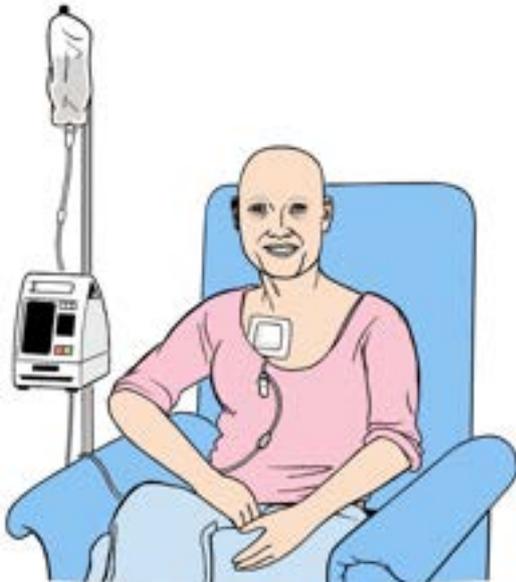
If you have any bruising or bleeding, it is important to see your doctor straight away.



# Losing your hair



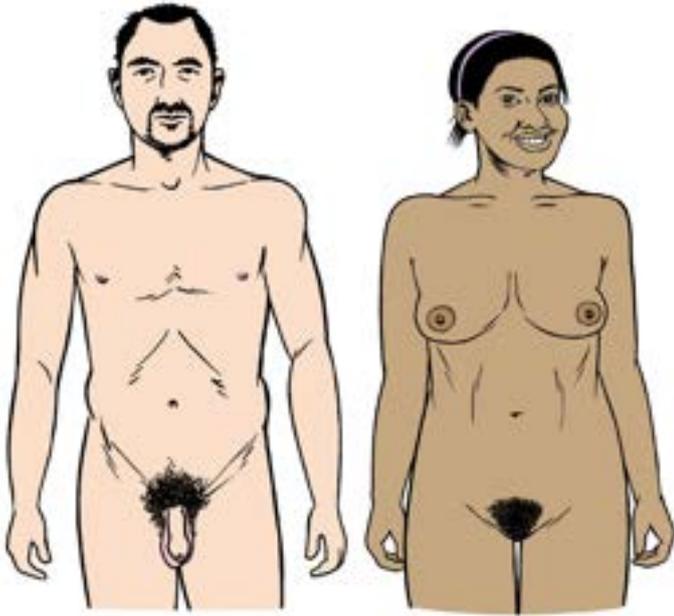
Some chemotherapy drugs don't change your hair very much.



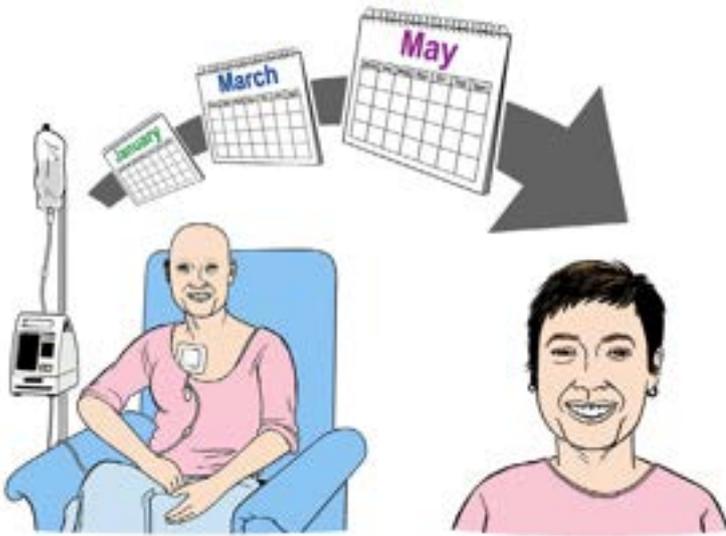
Other chemotherapy drugs can damage your hair or make it all fall out. This can be very upsetting.



Sometimes these drugs can also make your body hair, like your armpit and **pubic hair**, fall out too.



**Pubic hair** is the hair that grows on the private parts of your body.



The good thing is that your hair will usually grow back after your treatment ends.



There are things that can help if you are losing your hair:

- don't brush or comb your hair too roughly



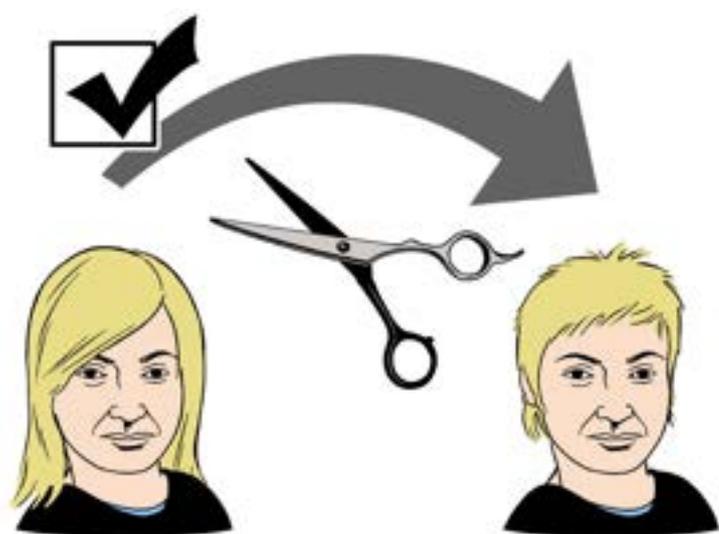
- if you want to dye your hair, check with your nurse first



- if you use a hairdryer, keep it on a low heat



- do not use hair straighteners or hair curlers



- you could cut your hair short, so the weight doesn't pull it out quicker



- there are special hats, scarves and turbans that you can wear



- you could also wear a wig.



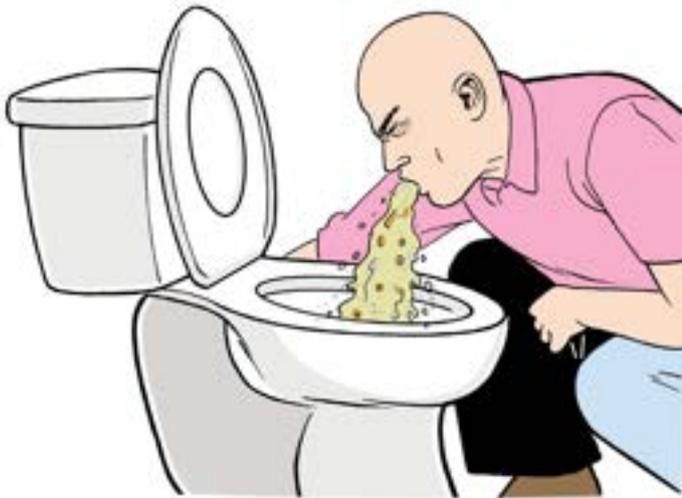
If your hair is going to fall out, ask the doctor or nurse about wigs before your treatment starts. You may be able to get a wig that is the same colour as your own hair.



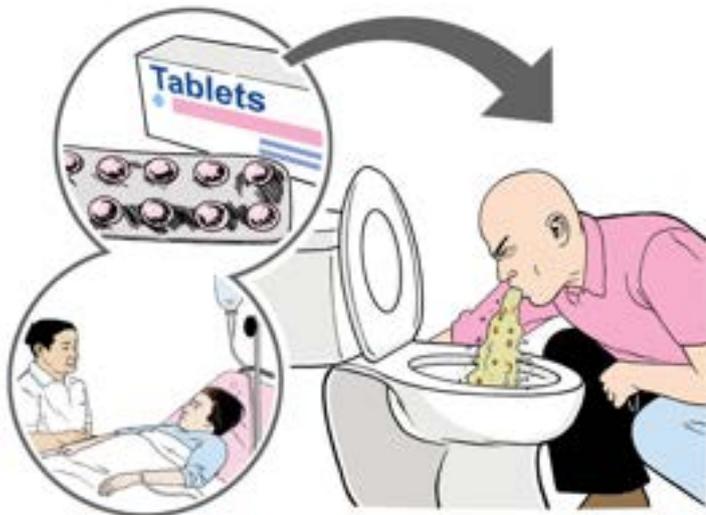
# Feeling sick or being sick



Some chemotherapy drugs can make you feel sick. Feeling sick is also called **nausea**. It can sometimes make you feel dizzy.



Some chemotherapy drugs can make you be sick. This may start while you have your treatment, or a few hours later.



There are treatments that can help you stop feeling sick or being sick.



There are things that can help if you are feeling sick or being sick:

- To stop you feeling sick the doctor can give you anti-sickness drugs before you have your chemotherapy. This might be an injection or tablets.



- You can also get some tablets to take home in case you feel sick at other times.



- Do not eat fried food and strong smelling foods.



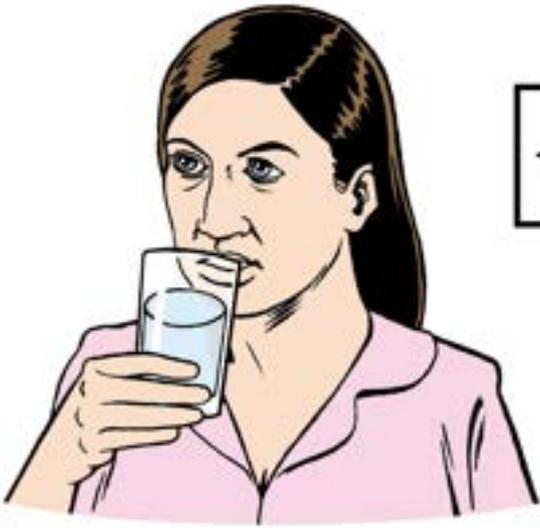
- Just eat small amounts of food you do like and feel OK eating.



- Food and drinks with ginger in them can help you feel better. Try ginger tea or ginger biscuits.



- Peppermints or peppermint tea can also help.



- Make sure you try to drink lots of liquids. Sip them slowly.



# Losing your appetite



Chemotherapy drugs can make you not feel as hungry as you used to. This is called a **loss of appetite**.



Even if you don't want to eat, it is important to eat something. Food will help you keep your strength and energy.



There are things that can help if you have lost your appetite:

- Eat small amounts more often instead of big meals.



- Eat healthy snacks like nuts or fruits.



- You can have special high energy drinks instead of some meals. Ask your **dietitian** about these.



A **dietitian** knows about food and diet. They can help with any problems with eating and food.



# Problems going to the toilet



Some chemotherapy drugs can give you **diarrhoea**. This is when your poo is watery and runny and you have to go more than usual.



Some chemotherapy drugs can give you **constipation**. This is when you find it hard to poo. Some anti-sickness drugs can do this too.

There are things that can help if you have problems going to the toilet:



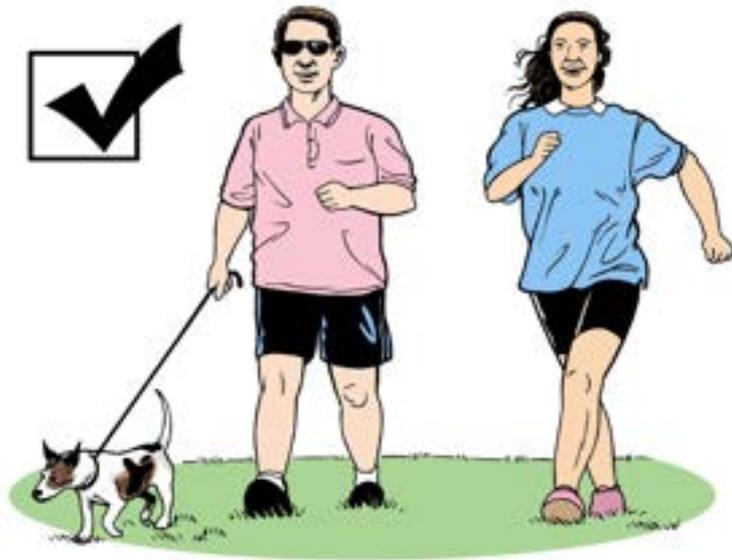
- If you have diarrhoea then you need to change what you are eating. Try not to eat cereals, raw fruits and vegetables.



- Try to drink lots of liquids such as water.



- If you have constipation, try to eat more fibre. Fibre is in brown bread, raw fruits and fruit juice, cereals and vegetables.



- Gentle exercise helps with constipation so try to have a walk every day.



# Your sense of taste



Chemotherapy can make your food and drink taste strange.



This will stop after your treatment ends.



It can help to eat things that you like but try to eat healthy food.



# Your mouth



Some chemotherapy drugs can make your mouth sore and cause **mouth ulcers**. These are painful sores in your mouth, usually on the inside of your cheeks or lips.

Mouth ulcers can get infected and be painful.

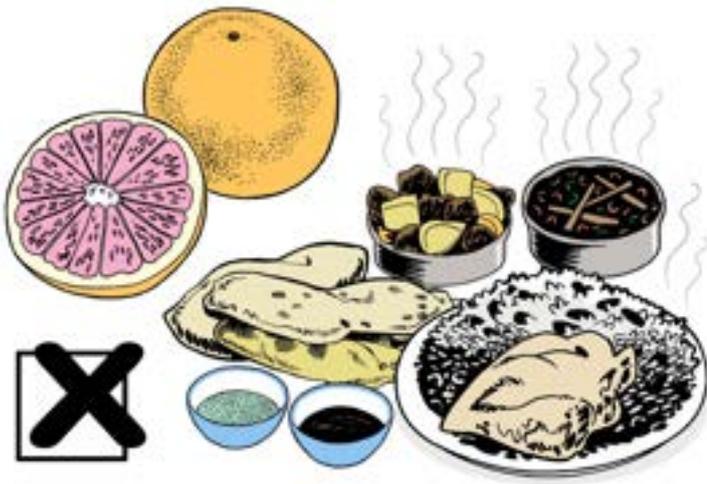
There are things that can help if you have a sore mouth or mouth ulcers:

- Tell your doctor if you have a sore mouth. They can give you mouthwashes, creams or gels.





- Clean your teeth gently and often with a soft toothbrush.



- Do not eat foods and drinks that will hurt your mouth, like grapefruit or spicy food.



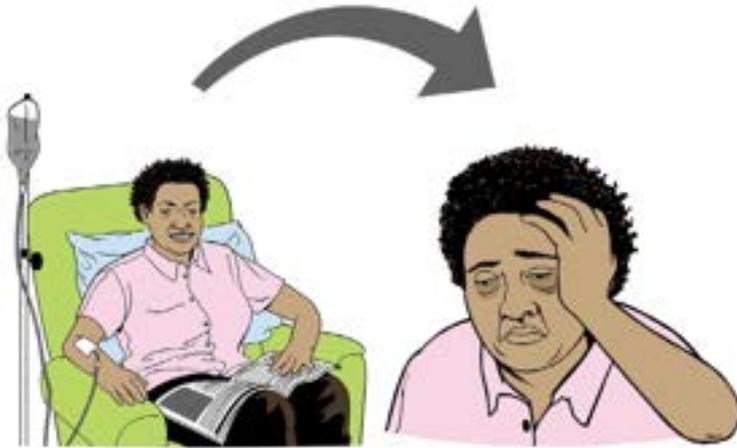
- Drink soothing drinks like herbal teas and water.



- If you have hot drinks like tea, let them cool down before you drink them. Very hot drinks can hurt your mouth.



# Tiredness



Chemotherapy can often make you feel very tired. This can be called **fatigue**.

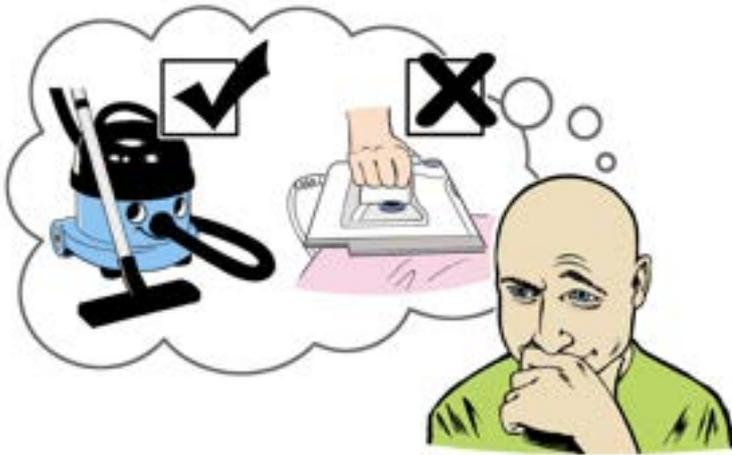
There are things that can help if you feel very tired:



- Try to do a little exercise every day. This will help you feel less tired.



- Rest as much as you can.



- Try to cut down the amount of things you have to do.



- Ask other people to help you do things.



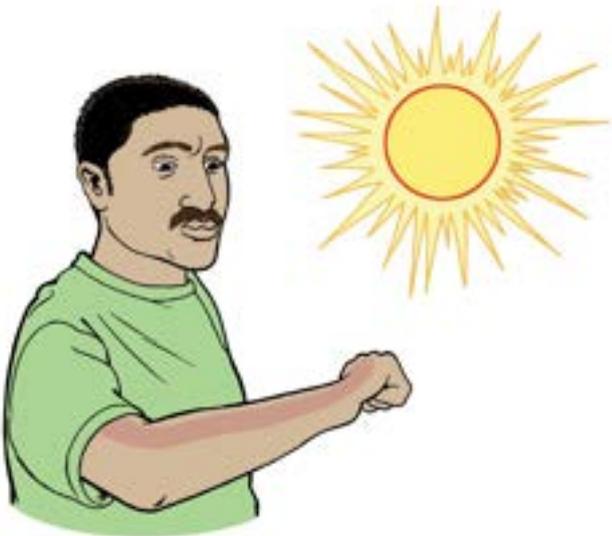
When your treatment ends it may take a few months for you to feel less tired and get your normal energy back.



# Changes to your skin and nails



Chemotherapy drugs can change your skin and nails. Your skin can become dry and itchy.



Your skin can become more sensitive to the sun and you can burn more easily.



Your nails may change colour and break more easily.



There are things that can help if you have changes to your skin and nails:

- Use moisturising cream on dry and flaky skin.



- Protect yourself in the sun by using high protection sun cream. You should also wear a hat and loose clothes with long sleeves.



There are other side effects that can happen because of chemotherapy treatment.

If you feel unwell in any way, talk to your doctor or nurse. They can help you with side effects.



# How Macmillan can help you



You can get support from:

- The Macmillan Support Line. Call **0808 808 00 00** 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm.



- The Macmillan website. Visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk) for lots of information about cancer and living with cancer.



- Information centres. At an information centre, you can talk to a cancer support specialist and get written information.



Find your nearest centre at [macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres) or call us. Your hospital might have a centre.



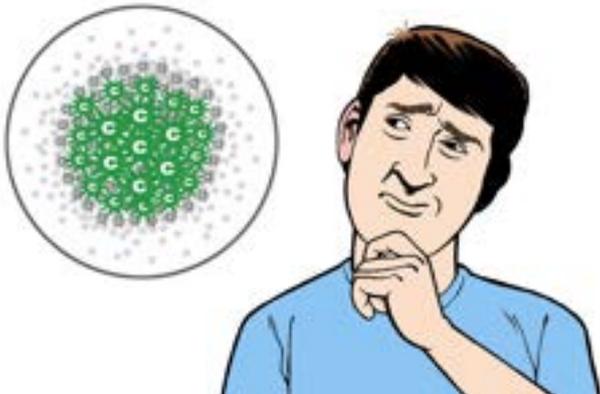
- Local support groups. Find a group near you at [macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups) or call us.



- The Macmillan Online Community. You can talk to other people in similar situations at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)



# More easy read booklets



Order more easy read booklets from [macmillan.org.uk/easyread](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/easyread)

There are booklets on lots of topics:

## About Macmillan

- How Macmillan Cancer Support can help you

## About cancer

- Lung cancer
- What is cancer?

## Signs and symptoms

- Breast care for women
- Cervical screening
- How to check your balls [testicles]
- Screening for cancer
- Signs of cancer
- Symptoms of cervical cancer
- Symptoms of prostate cancer



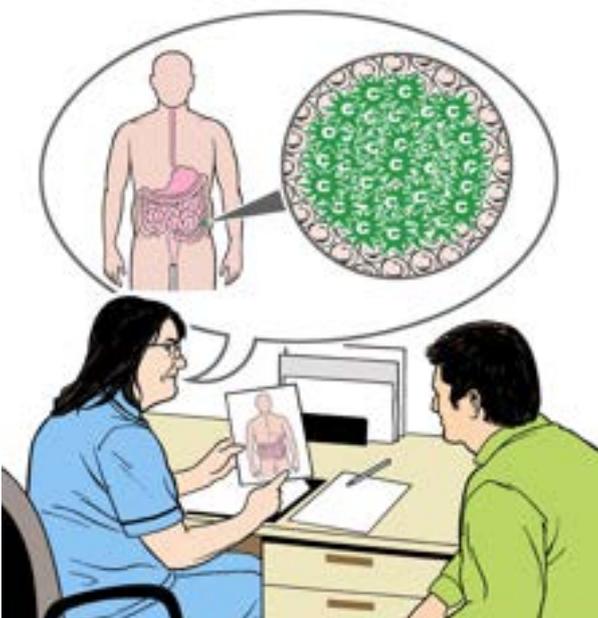
## Living a healthy life

- Be safe in the sun
- Drink less alcohol
- Eat a healthy diet
- Exercise
- Have safe sex
- Stop smoking



## Tests for cancer

- Having a biopsy
- Having a colonoscopy
- Having a CT scan
- Having an endoscopy
- Having examinations and blood tests
- Having an MRI scan
- Having an ultrasound
- Having an x-ray



## Being told you have cancer

- Finding out you have cancer
- Getting your test results
- Seeing the doctor



## Treatment for cancer

- Chemotherapy
- Giving your consent
- Having surgery
- Radiotherapy
- Side effects from chemotherapy
- Side effects from radiotherapy
- Treatments for prostate cancer



## Living with cancer

- 7 steps to equal healthcare
- After treatment for cancer
- Claiming benefits when you have cancer
- Complementary therapies
- Help with costs when you have cancer
- Talking about cancer and your feelings
- Things that are important to me
- Work and cancer
- Your feelings and cancer
- Your sex life and cancer
- Your social life and cancer



## End of life

- Changes that can happen at the end of life
- Choosing where to die
- Getting ready to die
- If you are dying from cancer
- Making decisions about the future if you are dying
- Spirituality and religion at the end of life
- The end of life
- Thinking about your funeral
- Who can help if you are dying



## After someone dies

- Going to a funeral when someone dies
- Grief and loss when someone dies
- How you may feel when someone dies
- What can help you feel better when someone dies

To order easy read booklets like this one go to the website [macmillan.org.uk/easyread](http://macmillan.org.uk/easyread) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**



# More information and resources



## Macmillan website

There is lots of information about cancer at [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)



## Booklets about cancer

You can order booklets about cancer from [be.macmillan.org.uk](http://be.macmillan.org.uk)



## Videos

You can watch videos about cancer at [macmillan.org.uk/videos](http://macmillan.org.uk/videos)



### Audio

You can listen to information about cancer and order CDs from [macmillan.org.uk/audio](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/audio)



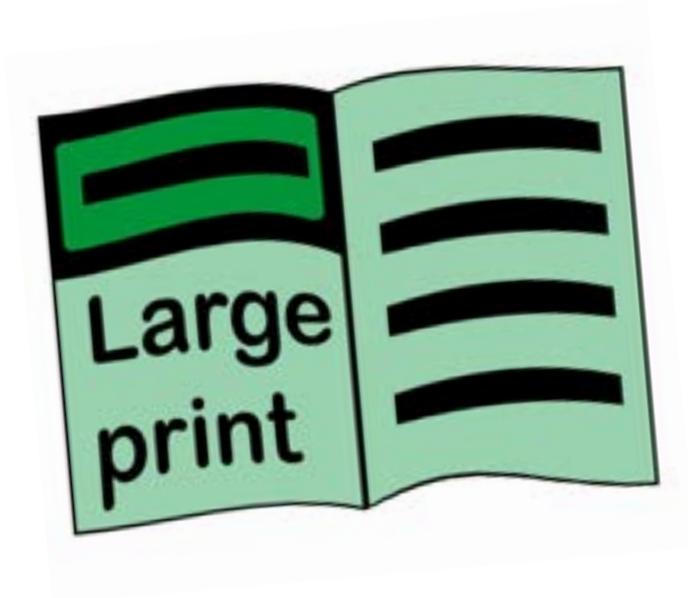
### British Sign Language (BSL)

You can watch information in BSL at [macmillan.org.uk/bsl](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/bsl)



### eBooks

You can get eBooks about cancer from [be.macmillan.org.uk](https://www.be.macmillan.org.uk)



## Large print

Tell us if you need information in large print.

Email: [cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk)



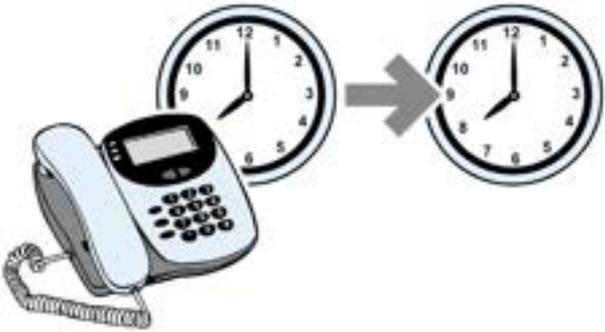
## Braille

Tell us if you need information in Braille.

Email: [cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk)

This booklet is about cancer.

It is for anyone who has a learning disability or who finds easier words and pictures helpful. If you have more questions about cancer or would like to talk to us, call the Macmillan Support Line.



- Call us free on:  
**0808 808 00 00**  
7 days a week from 8am to 8pm.



- If you use a textphone, you can call the Macmillan Support Line using the Next Generation Text (NGT) service by dialling  
**18001 0808 808 00 00**



- Or go to the website  
**[macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)**

This easy read booklet has been produced by Macmillan Cancer Support working with CHANGE.

**MAC16330\_ER\_E04** Produced March 2020.

Next planned review March 2023.

© Macmillan Cancer Support. All illustrations © CHANGE.

Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales [261017], Scotland [SC39907] and the Isle of Man [604].



In partnership with

**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT**