

Anticancer Drugs (General)

I. Introduction

Cancer drugs aim to kill cancer cells, limit cancer growth and relieve associated symptoms. There are many types of cancer drugs. Your doctor will choose drugs based on the type, stage, and genetic make-up of your cancer. Your doctor may have advised you to receive one or more of the following type(s) of treatment:

- Chemotherapy: drugs that directly kill cancer cells
- Targeted therapy: drugs that target steps in cellular processes to block cancer growth
- Immunotherapy: drugs that switch on parts of your immune system to fight cancer
- Hormonal therapy: drugs that stop hormone-reliant cancer cells from using hormones to grow

II. Risks and Side Effects

- All cancer drugs can cause side effects. Some side effects can be prevented or ameliorated by care or supportive medications. Many of the side effects will pass after treatment stops. Side effects of some drug will appear, persist or get worse after completion of treatment.
- The following are general common side effects of cancer drugs (however, this list is not exhaustive). Please refer to the specific drug information sheet(s) for details regarding your treatment.
 1. **Chemotherapy:** Can kill growing cancer cells, and may also kill some healthy cells. Common side effects can include bone marrow suppression (with weakened immunity, anemia or bleeding tendency etc.), mouth sores, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, skin pigmentation and hair loss. Chemotherapy may rarely cause the development of new but different cancers.
 2. **Targeted therapy:** You may experience different side effects depending on the type of targeted therapy you receive and how your body reacts to the therapy.
 3. **Immunotherapy:** It can cause side effects in different ways and to different extent. It is common to get skin rash. You may get flu-like symptoms, such as fatigue, fever, chills, nausea etc. Immunotherapy can sometimes cause serious inflammatory reactions in your lungs, bowels, liver, pancreas and skin. It can also disturb the body's normal hormone production.
 4. **Hormonal therapy:** The side effects are usually mild. Common side effects include hot flashes and irregular periods for females. Bowel upset, loss of interest in sex, fatigue, joint and muscle aches can occur in either male or female.

Note:

- **Cancer drugs can cause infertility. Please discuss with your doctor about fertility preservation if you are concerned.**
- **Rarely, patients may die or develop life-threatening treatment side effects.**
- **Treatments cannot always achieve their goals. These drugs may control cancers in some patients, but not others. Some patients whose cancers are initially controlled by the drugs may later experience cancer recurrence or regrowth.**
- **Despite taking all precautions, unpredictable and unpreventable adverse outcomes may occur after treatment. Please kindly ensure that you understand the pros and cons**

of the anticancer drugs treatment before deciding on undergoing the latter.

III. Prior to Treatment

- Your doctor will assess your disease and fitness by asking questions about your condition, ordering blood tests and other investigations to gain better understanding of your condition. The treatment plan will be explained to you along with anticipated side effects. Advice will also be given on how to cope with the treatment side effects.
- Payment: Some drugs are Self-Financed Items which are not provided as part of Hospital Authority's standard services nor covered by the standard fees and charges in public hospitals and clinics. Patients who choose to use these drugs must purchase them at their own expense. The drug price is open to fluctuations because it is based on the current market price. Price adjustments can therefore occur without prior notice. There will be no refund for all drugs dispensed or reconstituted. Cancer drug doses are often based on body build and patient condition. Therefore, the dose may be different for each individual.

IV. During Treatment

- Cancer drugs can be administered in several ways. It can be taken orally. It can also be injected into blood vessels (intravenously (IV)), into the fat tissue under your skin (subcutaneously), into the muscles (intramuscularly) or into the spine (intrathecally). Some drugs or patients may require treatment administration through catheters or ports that are surgically inserted into the body. You doctor will discuss with you if this is necessary.
- Treatments may need to be given during a hospital stay, or at the hospital day care center, or at home. No matter where you receive the treatment, the medical staff will take care of you and help you to manage the side effects.
- Cancer drugs can cause serious birth defects. Both male and female patients (if applicable) should use appropriate contraception during sexual intercourse and contraception should be continued for at least 6 months upon completion of treatment or as directed by your doctor. Talk to your doctor or nurse about it.
- During treatment, you should avoid taking other cancer drugs that are not prescribed by our doctors, as well as avoid traditional Chinese medicine or other herbal products. They may decrease the efficacy or cause unpredictable side effects when taken together with our treatment. If you do take other drugs or health products, always keep a written record of the names, doses and duration of these treatments.
- Female patients should avoid breast feeding during treatment and 6 months thereafter because the cancer drugs may pass into the breast milk and harm the baby.

V. After Treatment / Follow-up

- Your doctor will monitor your condition and the effectiveness of the treatment.
- Please attend your follow-up appointments as scheduled, return for blood tests or other relevant investigations as instructed. If you have fever or feel unwell after treatment, please seek medical advice.

VI. Remarks

The list of complications is not exhaustive and other unexpected side effects may rarely occur. The risk of some complications may actually be higher for certain patient groups. For further information, please contact your doctor.