

Tays / cancer treatment

## **For patients receiving chemotherapy**

### **General**

In chemotherapy, cytostatic agents are used to treat cancer as they prevent the growth and division of cancer cells in various ways. The drugs used in medication-base treatment of cancer and their combinations and doses are planned individually. Possible side effects of chemotherapy are due to the cytostatic agents also targeting healthy cells in the body, such as the bone marrow and mucous membranes. The quality and intensity of adverse reactions vary individually and the so-called auxiliary medicinal products to prevent them are planned individually. Monitoring the side effects is important, so remember to tell the staff about any emerging symptoms so that the medication can be adjusted.

Good hand hygiene is also very important during chemotherapy as it prevents infections. Make sure you are well hydrated a couple of days before and after the treatment. Before starting the treatment, make sure you have no dental issues to reduce the risk of infection.

### **Consumption of alcohol, vitamins and natural products**

Avoid consuming alcohol as well as vitamin and trace element products during chemotherapy unless an oncologist has specifically prescribed these products. In general, the use of naturopathic products is not recommended, as there is insufficient information on their effect on the efficacy or safety of treatment.

### **Pregnancy and fertility**

Some cytostatic agents may cause infertility, so discuss with your doctor before starting treatment if you are planning to have children. If you are in a fertile age, you should use a reliable method of contraception during treatment and for at least 2 years after the end of treatment.

Most cytostatic agents are excreted from the system within 2–7 days after treatment. It is recommended to wear a condom during sexual intercourse even if other contraception is used, so that your partner does not experience any contact with cytostatic agents.

### **Laboratory tests**

Laboratory tests are usually required before each treatment session. You can go to the nearest laboratory or Tays for blood tests. If there are any changes, we will contact you, as treatment may need to be postponed based on test results. If you notice anything notable in the way you are feeling before the treatment, contact the unit responsible for your treatment.

### **Implementation of chemotherapy**

Chemotherapy is usually an internal form of therapy, administered through a cannula inserted in a vein on your hand. The cannula will be removed after the treatment is finished. Some of the therapies can also be administered orally. Patients who are receiving repeated internal cancer treatment may get an implanted port which is placed under the clavicle while under local anaesthetic. The port is a small metal device through which a catheter enters the central venous system, allowing repeated and long-term administration of medicines.

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During the treatment, you can sit in the treatment chair or lie in the bed. It is also possible to move around, i.e. use the toilet, or drink and eat snacks.

If you experience burning or pain by the cannula during the treatment or you notice a lump next to it, inform the nurse immediately.

## Reimbursement of travel expenses

If necessary, you can get a travel reimbursement certificate for the use of your own car or Kela taxi during your oncology treatment appointment. It is not recommended to drive yourself when arriving for the first treatment.

## Protection against secretions after chemotherapy

As a rule, cytostatic agents are excreted from the body with urine and stools within a week. Pay special attention to intimate and hand hygiene when using the bathroom. Make sure to also protect yourself from secretions in sexual activities (wear a condom 2–7 days after treatment). It is recommended to drink more fluids before and after treatment for a few days.

## Medical treatment of cancer at the oncology outpatient clinic

Most of the medical cancer treatments at Tays are carried out as a daytime appointment at the oncology outpatient clinic, which is open on weekdays. Some of the treatments can be done at Tays Sastamala or Valkeakoski hospitals. Many cancer medication appointments are carried out as a low-cost follow-up appointment without a doctor's appointment. However, if need arises during your treatment to request a doctor's assessment, the appointment will be charged according to the doctor's fee. Cancer medication is prepared for you at a hospital pharmacy in accordance with the doctor's order, and in order to ensure that the pharmacotherapy appointment goes smoothly, the doctor's appointment and medical treatment are arranged on different days. During the treatment, you can eat food you have brought, listen to music, or read a book.

The doctor prescribes electronic prescriptions for any auxiliary medicinal products related to cancer treatment to prevent adverse effects from treatment. The nurse provides instructions on what medicines you must take at home before the treatment, what to continue taking at home after the treatment, and what you can take if you experience any adverse effects from the treatment.

Mention any issues related to certificates and prescriptions during the doctor's appointment. Bring also an up-to-date list of at-home medication when you come to the appointment. Your loved ones are always welcome to accompany you to the appointment.

You have the possibility to contact medical care staff online through the online cancer treatment clinic (Noona®) in non-emergency matters. The staff also uses it to contact patients, e.g. for electronic symptom surveys during treatments and, if necessary, for scheduling new laboratory tests. If you do not already have the log-in credentials for the online clinic, you can ask for them during your appointments.

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### **Medical treatment of cancer in inpatient wards RS1 and RS2**

The cancer treatment inpatient wards carry out the initial medical cancer treatments and longer-term medication treatments as well as medication treatments requiring special monitoring. The inpatient wards are open 24 hours every day of the week.

Auxiliary medicinal products related to the cancer treatment to prevent adverse effects will be given to you in the inpatient ward before the treatment. Upon discharge, you will be prescribed auxiliary medicinal products by your doctor, and the nurse provides instructions on what medicines you must continue taking at home after the treatment and what you can take if you experience any adverse effects from the treatment.

Please mention any issues related to certificates and prescriptions during the doctor's appointment. Your close ones are always welcome to bring you and pick you up from the inpatient ward and visit during the visiting hours. If you wish to have a treatment meeting with your loved ones involved, this must be agreed separately. Bring an up-to-date list of at-home medication when you come to the ward.

### **Adverse effects**

#### **Nausea**

Some of the cytostatic agents may cause nausea, but not all. When such medicine is used, effective anti-nausea medication is started already before the treatment. If necessary, this medication can be intensified and adjusted to suit you. There are several medications that can relieve or eliminate nausea altogether.

If you feel nauseous, try the following:

- eat frequently and a little at a time
- eat slowly and chew your food carefully
- eat more cold foods, especially if the smell of food makes you nauseous
- heavy liquid intake with meals may worsen the nausea, so drink only a little with meals

Fatty, sweet and spicy foods and foods with a strong smell can cause nausea. Avoid such foods if needed. Porridge, gruel, foos, yoghurts, etc. light and mild foods are better than greasy foods.

The treatments may change your sense of taste and smell. If you don't feel like eating familiar foods, try new dishes and snacks.

#### **Constipation**

Some painkillers, antiemetic medication, and cancer medicines may cause constipation. Constipation medication is often needed. You can get them at pharmacies without a prescription. In addition, make sure you are hydrated and eat enough fibrous foods. Wholegrain bread, porridge, bran, fruit, berries and vegetables are great sources of fibre. Physical activity also helps with constipation. The aim is to have a bowel movement every day.

#### **Diarrhoea**

Some cancer medicines may cause diarrhoea. It is important to stay well hydrated if you have diarrhoea. Suitable drinks include diluted juice, berry soup, weak tea and sports

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drinks (e.g. Dexal<sup>®</sup>, Hartsport<sup>®</sup>, Gatorade<sup>®</sup>). Pharmacies also sell powdered drinks for the treatment of diarrhoea (e.g. Osmosal<sup>®</sup>). Eat what you feel like eating often and in small portions.

- If the number of bowel movements increases to more than four times a day or if you develop diarrhoea at night, you should start taking loperamide (2 tablets or capsules = 4 mg, e.g. Imodium<sup>®</sup> or Lopex<sup>®</sup>) as soon as your symptoms appear. Continue taking 1 tablet/capsule every 6 hours until it has been 12 hours since the last time you had diarrhoea.
- If your symptoms are severe or persist for more than 24 hours or you develop a fever, contact your healthcare institution.
- Lactic acid bacteria or other products that improve the intestinal microbial strain (probiotics) are not recommended during the cancer treatment period.

### Other adverse effects

**Some of the cytostatic agents cause hair loss, which starts** approximately 1–2 weeks after treatment. Your healthcare institution can grant you a voucher for a wig. The hair grows back after the treatments.

**Feelings of exhaustion and fatigue** may increase during chemotherapy. Light exercise alleviates fatigue symptoms. Exhaustion and cytostatic agents may lower sexual desire.

**Musculoskeletal aches** may occur during some chemotherapy treatments, especially with a medicine that stimulates the production of white blood cells in the bone marrow (a so-called white blood cell growth factor). White blood cell growth factor is usually given in connection with certain cancer treatments that are known to cause significant reduction in the production of white blood cells. Painkillers can alleviate the ache.

**Skin irritation (pain, stinging, redness)** may occur even after treatment when the medication is administered intravenously or subcutaneously due to an irritation in the area around the local injection site or vein. If this happens, tell your nurse or doctor at the next appointment.

### Extravasation

Internally administered cytostatic agents may sometimes leak outside the vein into the surrounding tissue. This is called extravasation. You may feel this as immediate pain, stinging or discoloration on your skin. It is impossible to prevent it completely, even if all possible measures are taken, because a cannula can sometimes break a vein if you move. Therefore, it is best to avoid moving the infusion arm suddenly during treatment and to monitor sensations in the hand and arm during treatment. It is very important that if this rare side effect occurs, it is noticed and the damaged area is treated as instructed.

### Contact your care unit if you develop

- temperature over 38°C
- bleeding symptoms: large bruises, bleeding gums, persistent nosebleeds, gynaecological bleeding, haemoptysis, vomiting blood, black stool or haematoma
- severe abdominal pain, prolonged constipation or diarrhoea
- vomiting persists for more than 2 days despite medication
- extensive rash or other hypersensitivity reaction
- confusion, convulsions
  
- before the next treatment symptoms of flu, fever, abdominal pains, etc.

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**The phone number for the pharmacotherapy unit of the oncology outpatient clinic is 03 311 63468.**

We use a callback service. Follow the instructions and we will call you back. You can also contact the non-emergency clinic through the online cancer treatment clinic (Noona).

**Contact the inpatient wards if any issues arise on weekends, nights and evenings**

Oncology Ward 1 (RS1), telephone 03 311 63311

Oncology Ward 2 (RS2), telephone 03 311 63312

Medical Helpline, tel. 116 117