Discharge Instructions

Chemotherapy
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WHOM TO CALL FOR PROBLEMS

If you have problems, questions or concerns, or you are not feeling well, you may call the Norris Cotton Cancer Center (NCCC).

During Business Hours

A physician or nurse practitioner is available at the NCCC Monday through Friday, from 8:00 am, until 5 p.m. You will need to call your clinic secretary at ____________. When you call the clinic secretary let her know the nature of your concern. If it is urgent, be sure to let the clinic secretary know. Your call will then be transferred to a physician or nurse practitioner.

After Hours

If you call before 8:00 am or after 5:00 p.m., or anytime on the weekend, a physician or nurse practitioner is always available. Phone the hospital operator @ 603 650-5000 and ask for the physician or nurse practitioner on-call. Your call will be transferred to person who can help you. Give the following information to the provider:

* Your name
* Your diagnosis
* Your doctor
* Type of treatment you are receiving
* Symptoms you are having (e.g., fever, pain, cough, etc)
* Your temperature
* Your last white blood cell count, if you know it
MEDICATION REFILLS

If you wish to have a medicine refilled, you must call the pharmacy that filled your original prescription. The pharmacy will then call your physician or nurse practitioner for approval.

Some medications, such as for pain, require a special prescription, which cannot be refilled over the phone. You must come to the NCCC during regular hours (M-F 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.) to pick up this special prescription.

Remember to call your pharmacy for refills at least 2-3 days before you run out of medicine.

PLAN AHEAD- DO NOT WAIT UNTIL YOUR SUPPLY IS LOW

Chemotherapy can cause side effects. These instructions will tell you what to do about them and when to notify your doctor.

DURING CHEMOTHERAPY YOU MAY HAVE:

Nausea and Vomiting

Chemotherapy can sometimes cause nausea or vomiting. Do not wait to see if the feeling passes.

What to do:

- **Take your medicine for nausea as directed.**
- **Do not** force fluids, but drink small amounts of clear liquid. These can be taken in the form of ice or juice chips.
- Rest before meals.
- **Do not** eat foods that irritate the stomach. **Avoid** spicy, fatty foods. Eat bland foods, such as dry toast and crackers.
- Eat small frequent meals.
- Eat food cold or at room temperature.
- Take slow deep breaths when you feel nauseated.
- Apply cool cloths to your forehead and back of your neck.
- **Do not** lie on your back - lie on your side.
- Maintain good mouth care.
Notify your physician or nurse practitioner if you:

- unable to eat or drink for a 24-hour period.
- cannot take your medication(s).
- become dizzy or lightheaded.
- have blood in your vomit.
- take your anti-nausea medication(s) and still feeling nauseated or are vomiting.

**Diarrhea**

Chemotherapy may cause you to have loose or watery stools. Diarrhea is three or more loose or watery stools a day.

**What to do:**

- **Do not** eat high fiber foods that irritate or stimulate the digestive tract, such as raw vegetables, fruits or whole grains.
- Drink at least 32 ounces of liquids a day.
- Eat foods high in protein, calories, and potassium.
- Eat frequent small meals.
- Write down the number of bowel movements you have throughout the day.
- Clean your anal area with mild soap and rinse well with water after each bowel movement.
- **Take anti-diarrhea medicine only after talking to your care providers.**

Notify your physician or nurse practitioner if you:

- have more than six loose bowel movements a day.
- have blood in your stools.
- have persistent abdominal cramping or pain.
- become constipated and then begin to pass a small amount of diarrhea.
- feel dizzy or lightheaded.

**AFTER CHEMOTHERAPY YOU MAY HAVE:**

**Low Blood Counts**

Your blood counts are made up of **white blood cells**, which fight infection, **red blood cells** that carry oxygen, and **platelets**, which stop bleeding. Generally, blood counts fall between 7-14 days after chemotherapy. During the time your blood counts are at their lowest point (nadir), you should use good hand washing and avoid crowds and people with colds or infections.

Possible symptoms of a drop in your blood counts are fever, fatigue, bleeding and/or easy bruising.
Fever may indicate an infection while your white cell blood count is low (Neutropenia).

Signs of infection are:

- cough
- sore throat
- burning with urination
- diarrhea
- redness, swelling and tenderness of skin
- fever (above 100.4°F)

What to do

- Take your temperature twice a day and write it down.
- Drink at least 32 ounces of liquid a day.
- Get enough rest.
- Wash hands often especially before and after meals.
- Avoid crowds, stay away from sick people

Call your physician or nurse practitioner immediately if:

- your temperature is 100.4 F (38 C) or higher.
- if you develop any of the signs of infection listed above.
- Do not take any over-the-counter medication for your fever (Aspirin, Tylenol, Motrin, etc.) unless instructed to do so by your physician or nurse practitioner.

Fatigue may be the result from a low red blood cell count (anemia).

Fatigue caused by treatment is temporary and your energy will improve when blood counts return to normal.

Symptoms of fatigue are:

- low or no energy, weariness or general weakness,
- increased sleeping,
- being unable to carry out your usual activities of daily living,
- feeling short of breath,
- being unable to concentrate or think clearly,
- feeling irritable, tearful, or hopeless; or lacking emotion.

What to do:

- Plan rest periods to save energy.
- Pace activities according to energy level throughout the day.
- Get enough rest and sleep.
- Attempt to follow your usual routines as much as possible.
- Plan consistent periods of active exercise.

Call your physician or nurse practitioner if:

- you are too tired to get out of bed for 24 hours,
- you are feeling confused or unable to think clearly,
- fatigue becomes worse every day,
- you feel short of breath or are having a hard time breathing.
**Bleeding and/or bruising may be caused by low platelets (thrombocytopenia)**

Symptoms of low platelets:
- bleeding from parts of your body, such as the nose, mouth, rectum, bladder
- skin bruises or pinpoint red dots (petechiae) on the skin, especially your arms, legs, and inside your mouth.

What to do:
- **Avoid** trauma that may cause bleeding.
- **Do not** use a hard or stiff toothbrush or dental floss.
- Use a very soft toothbrush and do gentle mouth care, rinse frequently with cool water.
- **Do not** use suppositories or enemas.
- **Do not** strain to move your bowels.
- Apply pressure to stop minor bleeding.
- Use an electric razor.

Call your physician or nurse practitioner if you:
- bleed from your mouth or gums.
- feel lightheaded.
- have blood in your urine.
- have black (tarry) bowel movements, or rectal bleeding.
- vomit “coffee-ground color” or a bloody substance.
- have bleeding that does not stop after pressure has been applied for 5 minutes.
- bruise easily and/or have many, pinpoint red dots (petechiae) on your arms, legs or inside your mouth.

**BELOW ARE GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS THAT MAY HELP YOU FEEL BETTER DURING YOUR CHEMOTHERAPY TREATMENTS**

**Nutrition and fluid intake**

Your sense of taste may be affected by chemotherapy. If your mouth or throat becomes tender, try different foods, eat a well balanced diet high in proteins, eat small frequent meals at room temperature, or soft foods.

Increase your fluid intake to more 32 ounces of non-caffeinated liquid a day. Ice chips or popsicles may be helpful.

Call your physician or nurse practitioner if:
- you cannot eat or drink for 24 hours,
- you have a hard time swallowing,
- you vomit for more than 24 hours,
- you have not urinated for 12 hours,
- you are dizzy or feel faint,
- you feel disoriented or confused.
Mouth care

Your mouth/throat may become dry, tender, or painful.

What to do:

- Brush teeth gently with a soft toothbrush after meals.
- Rinse your mouth with water, lightly salted water, or baking soda (1 teaspoon in 2 cups of water) three to four times a day.
- Drink liquids with meals.

Call your physician or nurse practitioner if:

- you have a hard time swallowing,
- you have sores or white patches in your mouth,
- you have bleeding gums,
- you are unable to eat or drink for 24 hours.

These instructions are to help you care for yourself during chemotherapy. They do not cover all possible situations or side effects. If you have any questions, ask your physician or nurse practitioner.
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