



SEXUAL FUNCTION & FERTILITY

Patient Information

SEXUAL FUNCTION & FERTILITY

Chemotherapy treatment (chemo) may, but does not always, affect a person's sexual organs and functioning. Possible side-effects will depend on the medications prescribed to you as well as your age and general health.

When men receive chemotherapy it may lower the number of sperm cells produced, reduce sperm cell motility, or it may cause other sperm cell abnormalities. These changes can result in short or long-term infertility affecting the ability to father a child. The treatment does not, however, affect your ability to have sexual intercourse.



Because permanent sterility (infertility) may occur, it is important to discuss this possibility and the option of 'banking' sperm for future use with your doctor before starting chemo treatment.

Chemo may have harmful effects on chromosomes of sperm cells, so it is important that men and their partners use effective means of birth control whilst undergoing the chemo treatment. Ask your doctor when it is safe to stop using birth control.

When women receive chemotherapy it can damage the ovaries and reduce hormones production, resulting in short-or long-term infertility (inability to fall pregnant). It is important to discuss this possibility with your doctor before starting chemo.



The effects of chemo on your hormones may include the following side-effects:

- Menstrual periods may become irregular or stop completely.
- Menopause-like symptoms, e.g. hot flushes, itching, burning, or dryness of the vagina and surrounding area. This can make intercourse uncomfortable, of which the symptoms can often be relieved by using water-based vaginal lubricant.
- Vaginal infections are more likely to occur.

TIPS TO HELP PREVENT INFECTION

- Avoid oil-based lubricants such as petroleum jelly.
- Always use a condom for sexual intercourse.
- Wear cotton underwear and pantyhose with a breathable cotton lining.
- Don't wear tight slacks or shorts.
- Your doctor may prescribe a vaginal cream or suppository to reduce the chances of infection.
- Report vaginal infections so that they are treated right away.

Although it may be possible to have chemotherapy during pregnancy, it is not advisable because sometimes such treatments may cause birth defects. Doctors generally advise women within childbearing age to use birth control throughout their treatment. If you are considering pregnancy after completing chemotherapy, discuss it with your doctor.

EMOTIONAL EFFECTS

Chemotherapy usually brings major changes to a person's life. It can affect your overall health, threaten feelings of well-being, disrupt your daily routines, and put a strain on your relationships. It is normal and understandable if you or your family and friends feel sad, anxious, angry, or depressed. There are ways to cope with these emotional side-effects, just as there are ways to cope with the physical side-effects of chemotherapy.

Tips for coping with emotional effects:

It is easier to face the reality of a situation if you learn as much as possible about it – knowledge can help lessen the fear of the unknown. There is a great deal to learn about each type of cancer and the treatment thereof as there are many sources of information that you can utilise. Ask your doctor and nurse about where you can obtain information and make your medical appointments as useful as possible by:

- making a list of any questions to ask the doctor / nurse;
- take a family member or friend with you to serve as an extra pair of ears as well as to support you;
- take notes and / or record important discussions and conversations; and
- ask for an explanation if a unfamiliar word is used or if there is something mentioned that you don't understand.

Counselling professionals

Counsellors can help you to express, understand, and cope with emotions brought about by chemotherapy. There are a number of different professionals that can help you depending on your preferences and needs. These include a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, sex therapist, or spiritual support through a chaplain, pastor, rabbi, or other religious leader.

Friends and family

Friends and family members can sometimes provide you with comfort and reassurance in ways that no one else can. Many people may initially worry about upsetting you if they approach the subject. You can help relieve these fears by talking openly with them about your illness, the treatment you are undergoing, your feelings and the ways in which they can assist you.

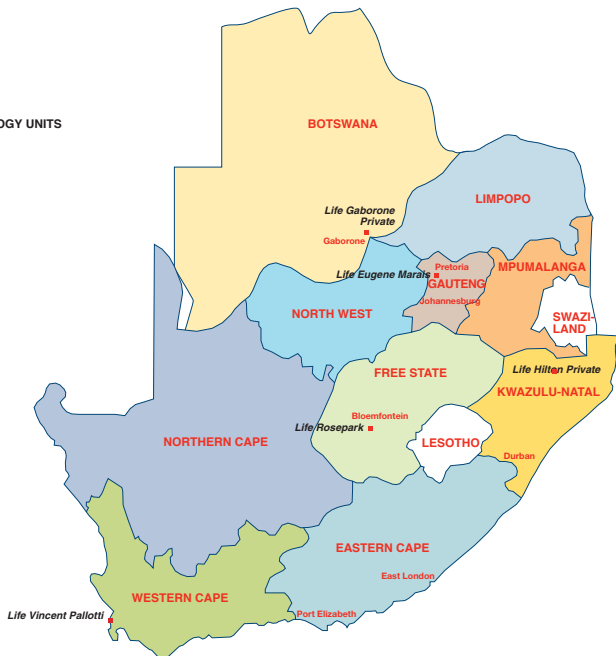
Support groups

Support groups are made up of people who are going through the same or similar experiences as what you are facing. Sometimes it is easier to share your thoughts and feelings in this setting. Support groups also can serve as an important source of practical information about living with cancer and its treatment. Ask your doctor or nurse for information on the groups available in your area. If you feel overwhelmed by sadness or if you have thoughts of suicide, talk to your doctor or nurse about it or visit your nearest accident and emergency unit. Other symptoms that you should speak about include feelings of panic, intense anxiety and / or constant crying.

OTHER SIDE-EFFECTS

Chemotherapies might cause other side-effects that have not been covered in this booklet. Remember to always raise your questions and concerns about cancer, its treatment, or possible side-effects when you speak to your doctor and nurse.

Life Oncology units are located in the following areas:



Oncology units

FREE STATE ■ Life Rosepark Hospital **GAUTENG** ■ Life Eugene Marais Hospital **KWAZULU-NATAL** ■ Life Hilton Private Hospital
WESTERN CAPE ■ Life Vincent Pallotti Hospital **BOTSWANA** ■ Life Gaborone Private Hospital

FREE STATE

LIFE ROSEPARK HOSPITAL

57 Gustav Crescent, Fichardt Park, Bloemfontein, 9301
 Tel: 051 505 5111

GAUTENG

LIFE EUGENE MARAIS HOSPITAL

Corner of 5th Avenue and Booyen Street, Les Marais, Pretoria, 0084
 Tel: 012 334 2507

KWAZULU-NATAL

LIFE HILTON PRIVATE HOSPITAL

Corner of Monzali Drive and Hilton Avenue, Hilton Garden, 3245
 Tel: 033 329 5820

WESTERN CAPE

LIFE VINCENT PALLOTTI HOSPITAL

Alexandra Road, Pinelands, Cape Town, 7405
 Tel: 021 506 5111

BOTSWANA

LIFE GABORONE PRIVATE HOSPITAL

Plot 8448 Mica Way, Broadhurst, Gaborone
 Tel: +267 368 5746

www.lifehealthcare.co.za

