

# Oncology Directorate and Haematology SDU

## Discharge advice from ward D6

### Introduction

Following discharge there are still certain precautions to take and things to be aware of. Before you leave the ward a member of the nursing team will go through these with you to ensure you are aware of the early signs of complications that could occur.

### Checking for Infection

Prior to discharge you will be taught how to take your temperature. You should take your temperature in the morning and at night or if you feel unwell. You should ring the ward immediately on 01223 216643 if

- Your temperature is 38°C or above for two readings within a twelve hour period (at least one hour apart) or
- Your temperature is 38.5°C or above for one reading

### If you suspect an infection

If you have any reason to suspect an infection (for example sore throat, shivers, cough, discharge from line, generally feeling unwell etc) take your temperature and phone the ward, whether you have a temperature or not. Always ring D6 or your specialist nurse (during office hours) and not your GP.

### Neutropenia

A side effect of your treatment is that it can cause a fall in the number of white blood cells. These cells help your body to fight infection, and make up part of your immune system. Neutrophils are the most abundant type of **white blood cells** in humans and form an integral part of your **immune system**. A fall in your neutrophil count is known as a condition called neutropenia, and means you are very susceptible to infections. When you are neutropenic you should not have Aspirin, Ibuprofen or Paracetamol as a painkiller because they can hide a temperature. If you require regular painkillers, contact the ward and we will supply you with an alternative.

If you are neutropenic when you leave the ward or are going to become neutropenic, the doctors will have prescribed some antibiotics. These are to try to prevent some of the common infections occurring and it is important that you take them as prescribed.

### Anaemia

Following chemotherapy, a fall in the level your haemoglobin (Hb), which is an oxygen carrying protein found in red blood cells, may make you feel tired and lethargic, short of breath or give you heart palpitations (a change in the rate or rhythm of your heart beat), dizziness or pallor. If you experience any of these symptoms you should contact the ward.

## Bleeding

A low platelet count will mean you are more likely to bruise or bleed. If you notice you are bruising easily or you start to bleed (for example from your nose or back passage) then you should contact the ward immediately.

Do not use Aspirin or Ibuprofen as a painkiller as these drugs thin the blood and will make you more likely to bleed. The ward will provide an alternative such as Codeine if required.

## Mouth Care and Visiting the Dentist

You should continue with your mouth care once you are at home. Examine your mouth daily when you perform mouth care for any signs of infection (e.g. ulcers or white spots). Contact the ward if you notice these or you develop ulcers, or your mouth becomes painful. When brushing your teeth make sure you use a soft toothbrush to prevent any damage to your gums.

Should you need to visit the dentist it is advisable to seek advice from your specialist nurse first. If you do need to see a dentist make sure you tell them what treatment you are on e.g. radiotherapy or chemotherapy.

## Environment and socialising

When you are neutropenic you are more likely to catch infections from other people. Because of this we advise you to avoid enclosed, smoky or crowded places, such as pubs, busy shops and cinemas at peak viewing times until your neutrophil counts have fully recovered.

## Diet and Alcohol

The nurses and doctors will discuss with you before you go home whether or not you need to adhere to the "neutropenic diet". Foods that you can and can't eat on this diet should already have been discussed with you and is available on the neutropenic diet sheet (PIN1693). Even if you don't need to keep to this diet (i.e. your neutrophil count is above 1), it is essential that you remain meticulous about normal food hygiene measures such as hand washing and comply with food storage instructions and "eat by" dates.

You should avoid food from mobile vans and take away restaurants. Chinese and Indian meals should also be avoided. It is also safer to continue to avoid unpasteurised produce. Try to eat a high calorie, high protein diet to build yourself up between courses of treatment and maintain a good fluid intake of two to three litres a day.

It is usually safe to drink alcohol in moderation but check with the doctors first as alcohol may interfere with the action of some drugs. Canned beer is preferable over draught as real ale contains yeast, which can cause fungal infections.

If you experience eating difficulties, such as lack of appetite, taste changes, a sore mouth or just want advice about a healthy diet please ask to be referred to the dietitian.

## Fertility and Sexuality

It is quite safe for you to have sexual intercourse in between courses of chemotherapy, providing your partner is well and has no infections. It is important for you, or your partner not to get pregnant whilst you are undergoing treatment so please take adequate contraceptive precautions.

**For Women:** The intrauterine device and the diaphragm should not be used because of the infection risk. Women may find that they experience vaginal dryness. If this occurs you may use a vaginal lubricant, available to buy over the counter.

If your platelet count is low it is important to be gentle and report any unusual bleeding to the ward. For women who are pre-menopausal, medication will be prescribed to stop your menstrual periods whilst your platelet count is low.

There may be emotional and psychological factors that prevent you from re-establishing normal sexual activity. Cancerbackup have a useful booklet called Sexuality and Cancer: a free copy can be obtained by calling – Tele: 0808 800 1234. It is normal for your sex drive to be reduced. If you are having relationship problems it may be possible to see a trained counsellor. Please ask a member of staff for details.

## Skin care

Your skin may become more sensitive or dry following chemotherapy. Use mild creams such as baby lotion or aqueous cream to relieve this.

When outdoors, especially during the summer months, it is important to apply a high factor sun cream as chemotherapy treatments can make your skin more sensitive to sun burn.

## Travel and holidays

Whilst your blood counts/levels are low you should avoid driving and try not to use public transport. Once your counts begin to rise it is usually safe to start driving again, but check with the doctors first. You should not take a holiday during the initial intensive phase of treatment. If at a later date you wish to go abroad, please check with medical staff first. They will be able to give advice on immunisations and arrange medical supervision in the area you wish to visit, so you may receive expert advice should you need it.

Cancerbackup can advise you on travel insurance.

## Going back to Work/College Work

Your return to work depends on how quickly you recover and what your job entails. People with less demanding jobs may wish to continue with work in between courses of chemotherapy. However, people with highly demanding jobs which pose a high risk of infection (e.g. school teachers, nurses or those dealing with the general public) may need to spend a longer time away from work. It may be a good idea to return to

work on a part time basis initially, as it can take some months before you return to full fitness. This should be discussed with your employer or occupational health department. If you are unsure about when to return to work or college, the doctors will be able to advise you. If being away from work is causing financial difficulties or there is a possibility that you may lose your job, please ask the nurses on the ward to contact the Citizens Advice Bureau in the Addenbrookes's concourse. There may be benefits that you are entitled to because of your illness.

## College

If you are at college it may be possible to continue some of your studies at home. The ward will be able to supply you with sick certificates for your employer throughout your treatment.

## Sport

You should avoid all contact sports, such as football, rugby and hockey. Swimming is not advised while you are undergoing treatment because of increased risk of infections etc. Gentle aerobic exercise, such as walking or cycling is good for you and may build up fitness, but don't overdo it.

## Clinic appointments

Your next appointment date and time will be given to you before you leave the ward. It is important you keep these appointments; if you are unable to make your appointment please telephone the ward so that a new one can be made. If you require hospital transport please speak to the ward clerk or the clinic receptionist who will be able to arrange this. They will require 72 hours notice.

## Useful contact numbers

Being at home after treatment can often be a daunting prospect. If you have any problems or want to talk to someone, please do not hesitate to call Ward D6 or the Haematology Day Unit (E10) on one of the numbers below:

**Ward D6 - Tel: 01223 216643**

Box 21

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Hills Road

Cambridge CB2 0QQ

**Oncology Clinic Reception - Tel: 01223 216551/216552**

**E10 Haematology Day Unit - Tel: 01223 217720**

Opening hours: Monday-Friday 08:00 - 20:00

Saturday 08:00 - 16:00

## Haematology specialist nurse

Telephone numbers will be given to you by your specialist nurse.



Addenbrooke's is smoke-free. You cannot smoke on site. For advice on quitting, contact your GP or the NHS smoking helpline free, 0800 169 0 169

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format: 01223 216032 or [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

Informacje te można otrzymać w innych językach, w wersji dużym drukiem lub audio. Zamówienia prosimy składać pod numerem: 01223 216032 lub wysyłając e-mail: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

## Polish

Se precisar desta informação num outro idioma, em impressão de letras grandes ou formato áudio por favor telefone para o 01223 216032 ou envie uma mensagem para: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

## Portuguese

Если вам требуется эта информация на другом языке, крупным шрифтом или в аудиоформате, пожалуйста, обращайтесь по телефону 01223 216032 или на вебсайт [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

## Russian

若你需要此信息的其他語言版本、大字體版或音頻格式，請致電 01223 216032 或發郵件到: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

## Cantonese

Bu bilgiyi diger dillerde veya büyük baskılı ya da sesli formatta isterseniz lütfen su numaradan kontak kurun: 01223 216032 veya asagidaki adrese e-posta gönderin: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

## Turkish

এই তথ্য বাংলায়, বড় অক্ষরে বা অডিও টেপে পেতে চাইলে দয়া করে 01223 216032 নম্বরে ফোন করুন বা [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk) ঠিকানায় ই-মেইল করুন।

## Bengali

Document history			
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