



Frequently Asked Questions

Metropolitan Veterinary Hospital Oncology Department

What is chemotherapy?

- Chemotherapy is a drug treatment that kills rapidly dividing cells, such as cancer cells. For some cancers, such as lymphoma, chemotherapy may be the primary mode of treatment. For other cancers, such as osteosarcoma, chemotherapy may be recommended following surgery. The majority of chemotherapy drugs used in veterinary oncology are the same drugs used in people.

How is chemotherapy given?

- Most chemotherapy is administered into a vein (intravenously) or orally. Less commonly, a drug may be administered into a body cavity (intracavitary). For some cases, oral chemotherapy may be sent home with a patient for administration at home. Please wear gloves when handling and administering chemotherapy and do not *crush, split* or *open* tablets or capsules.

What are potential side effects of chemotherapy?

- In general, dogs and cats undergoing chemotherapy treatment do not experience the same side effects as humans and can have a good to excellent quality of life. The majority of patients (80%) have no or minimal side effects which can be managed at home. Approximately 5% of patients will have severe enough side effects to require hospitalization. The best thing you can do to help maintain your pet's quality of life is to monitor for side effects and communicate any concerns with your pet's health care team. Please see below for more detailed information about managing side effects at home.

When to call a veterinarian regarding your pet's side effects:

Clinical Signs Requiring Medical Attention

Clinical Sign	Concerning Threshold
Vomiting	More than 2 episodes
Diarrhea	Severe or persistent
Anorexia (not eating)	Greater than 48 hours
Lethargy	Persistent or worsening
Urine output	No urine production for more than 24 hours
Rectal temperature	Greater than 102.5°F

LETHARGY

Lethargy is one of the more common side effects associated with chemotherapy treatment. Your pet may have intermittent lethargy in the week following chemotherapy treatment.

Additionally, your pet may be lethargic the day of or the day following chemotherapy due to the stress of a hospital visit - THIS IS NORMAL.

What can you do?

- Unfortunately, lethargy cannot be specifically prevented or treated. However, monitor your pet for other side effects described below and continue to provide them with their normal daily comforts.



GASTROINTESTINAL SIDE EFFECTS

Gastrointestinal side effects most frequently occur 2-5 days after chemotherapy treatment and are described in more detail below. Depending on the chemotherapy being given, your pet may be sent home with oral medications to prevent or control these side effects.

NAUSEA

Nausea or decreased appetite may include not eating, approaching food bowl but then not eating, drooling and/or gulping.

What can you do?

- Start anti-nausea medications (Cerenia, ondansetron) and appetite stimulants (Entyce, mirtazapine)
- Entice your pet with a small amount of high value food (canned cat food, table scraps)
- Call clinic if nausea or decreased appetite persists > 48 hours

VOMITING

What can you do?

- For mild cases (1-2 episodes), start anti-nausea medications (Cerenia, ondansetron)
- If vomiting continues, withhold food for 4-6 hours. Continue to offer small amounts of water on a regular basis. If your pet does not vomit during this time frame, offer small amounts of a bland diet (boiled chicken and rice or prescription diets such as Purina EN or Hills I/D)
- If vomiting is severe or continues more than 24 hours, your pet should be evaluated by a veterinarian and may be given injectable medications and fluids

DIARRHEA

What can you do?

- Offer a bland diet, as described above. Continue to offer plenty of fresh water
- Start probiotics such as Provable®, Visbiome®, Fortiflora.® These can be purchased online or at your veterinarian's office
- Add fiber (Metamucil) to your pet's food at a dose of *1 teaspoon per 10 pounds of body weight*
- If the above treatments do not work, you may give Pepto Bismol® at a dose of *1 teaspoon per 10 pounds of body weight three times a day*. Do NOT give Pepto Bismol® to cats!
- If diarrhea is severe or persists more than 48 hours, your pet should be evaluated by a veterinarian.

BONE MARROW SIDE EFFECTS

Chemotherapy can temporarily reduce the release of important blood cells from the bone marrow, such as white blood cells and platelets. This most often occurs 1-2 weeks after treatment. In most cases, you will not notice any changes in your pet. However, in some cases, a low white blood cell count may be associated with fever, lethargy and/or a decreased appetite. If this occurs, your pet will need antibiotics and, in rare cases, may need to be hospitalized. A complete blood count (CBC) is performed prior to each chemotherapy administration to monitor these cell counts and ensure chemotherapy can be safely administered. If these counts are low, treatment may be delayed for several days.

What can you do?

- Monitor for signs of lethargy, decreased appetite, vomiting and/or diarrhea
- If you observe these side effects, take a rectal temperature. A normal rectal temperature is up to 102.5oF at rest. If your pet's temperature is above this, please contact a member of your pet's health care team immediately.



ALLOPECIA (HAIR LOSS)

In general, most dogs undergoing chemotherapy will not lose fur during treatment. However, breeds that require grooming and trimming of hair, such as Poodles or Old English Sheepdogs, will often lose their hair during chemotherapy. Although hair and fur will not regrow during treatment, it will regrow after therapy is finished. Fur/hair loss is uncommon in cats, although loss of whiskers does recur.

What can you do?

- For affected breeds, keep your pet's coat short to keep hair from becoming matted or tangled when hair/fur loss occurs

OTHER SIDE EFFECTS

TISSUE DAMAGE can occur, with some chemotherapy drugs, if the drug gets outside a vein (termed extravasation injury). As a result, it is important that patients are calm and cooperative during administration. For some patients, your veterinarian may prescribe anti-anxiety medications to help facilitate administration.

What can you do?

- Administer anti-anxiety drugs (e.g., trazadone, gabapentin) as prescribed. While your pet may be a bit sleepy, this will help keep your pet as safe as possible.
- Please notify your pet's health care team if you notice redness, pain or swelling at any chemotherapy administration sites (usually identifiable by small, shaved areas on limbs).

CYCLOPHOSPHAMIDE is an oral chemotherapy that can cause irritation of the bladder termed, *sterile hemorrhagic cystitis* (SHC).

What can you do?

- Monitor your pet for signs of *straining to urinate, blood in the urine or increased frequency of urination*. If you observe any of these signs, contact a member of your pet's health care team.
- Be sure your pet can urinate every 4-6 hours for 48 hours after treatment with cyclophosphamide.
- Offer ample fresh water to your pet to encourage drinking and urination.

Chemotherapy is excreted in your pet's urine, feces, and other bodily fluids. It is recommended that you wear latex gloves and use disposable cleaning supplies when cleaning up your pet's bodily fluids. Any soiled clothing or bedding should be washed separately and twice in hot water.

**Thank you for entrusting us with your pet's care during this difficult time.
We are honored to support you and your pet, and we are here for you
every step of the way.**

For additional questions, please contact our office:

Akron/Copley:

Monday-Thursday 8:00am-4:30pm

(330) 670-2352 – Oncology Service Direct Line

(330) 666-2976 – 24/7 Metro Emergency Service

Cleveland East:

Monday-Friday 8:00am-4:30pm

(216) 201-9842 – Oncology Service Direct Line

(440) 673-3483 – 24/7 Metro Emergency Service