

Combination Therapy

Cancer Treatments: Combination Therapy

Combination therapy uses more than one cancer treatment to treat your cancer. This means you may have:

- Surgery and radiation therapy;
- Surgery and systemic therapy (for example, chemo);
- Radiation therapy and systemic therapy;
- Surgery, systemic therapy, and radiation therapy.

How does combination therapy work?

To understand combination therapy, you first need to know how each kind of cancer treatment works:

- Surgery and radiation therapy treat cancers that affect one part of your body (such as your breast).
- Systemic therapy treats cancer cells that have spread throughout your body (such as leukemia) or cancer cells that have moved from one place (such as your prostate gland) to another place (such as your bones).

Sometimes, your doctor will suggest that you have radiation therapy and/or systemic therapy to shrink the cancer before you have surgery. In other cases, doctors will suggest that you have the systemic therapy and/or radiation therapy after surgery to kill any cancer cells that may have been left behind.

Combination therapy can:

- Control your cancer for awhile.
- Reduce the risk of cancer coming back.
- Help you get rid of or cope with cancer symptoms, such as pain.

(Please see the fact sheets on Systemic Therapy, Radiation Therapy, and Surgery to learn more about each of these treatments.)

**What are your questions? Please ask.
We are here to help you.**

Why is combination therapy best for me?

For some cancers, combination therapy is the best treatment. Your health care team will explain why and what kind of combination therapy is best for you.

How is combination therapy given?

How and where you get your treatments depends on the kinds of treatments that you will be having.

What are the side effects of combination therapy?

Some cancer treatments may cause side effects. Some people do not have any side effects; other people may have a few or many side effects. No one knows exactly which side effects you might have until you begin your treatment.

Your health care team will give you details about the side effects that you might have and how to cope with them.

Please keep in mind that side effects are not a sign of how well the treatment worked against your cancer.

How can I cope with my cancer and treatment?

It is normal for you and your family to have many feelings at this time. Talk with your doctor, nurse, or someone else on your health care team about your feelings.

All team members will answer your questions and help you.

Questions to ask your health care team

- What combination of cancer treatments is best for me and why?
- What are the benefits and risks of these treatments to me?
- How and where will I get the treatments?
- Who can be with me during my treatments?
- How will we know if the treatments worked?
- Will I be able to go to work when I'm having these treatments?
- Can I keep doing the things that I used to do? What should I not do?
- Will the treatments affect whether or not I can have children?
- Can I travel or take a vacation when I'm having the treatments?
- How often will I see my cancer doctor during my treatments?
- What happens when the treatments end?

Looking for more information on this topic?

You can contact the Canadian Cancer Society at www.cancer.ca or call the Cancer Information Service of the Cancer Society at 1-888-939-3333. You can also contact your local public library for books, videos, magazine articles and online health information. For a list of public libraries in Nova Scotia go to

<http://publiclibraries.ns.ca>.

For additional information you may contact your Cancer Patient Navigator toll free at 1-866-524-1234. Also visit the Nova Scotia Cancer Care Program website www.nscancercare.ca.

Patient and family feedback is very important to us.

We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to education.cancercare@nshealth.ca or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.

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This pamphlet is for educational purposes only.

It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.