



## TRANSCRIPT:

### Preparing for chemotherapy Part 2: Side effects of chemotherapy

In this video we're going to talk about:

- The common side effects of chemotherapy
- And we'll hear perspectives from people who've been through chemotherapy for womb cancer, and their recommendations for how to get through it.

#### **[Possible side effects of chemotherapy]**

There can be lots of side effects to chemotherapy. The most common are:

- Fatigue
- A higher risk of infection due to your blood-producing cells being affected
- Anaemia, which means you have a low red blood cell count
- Bruising and bleeding, which is caused by low platelets
- Paclitaxel causes hair loss which can include body hair and eyelashes, but this should grow back once chemotherapy ends
- Paclitaxel can also affect the nerves to the hands or feet causing numbness or tingling — called neuropathy
- Food and drinks may taste different to normal

Medications, including steroids and anti-sickness, are often given alongside the chemotherapy to help your body cope with the treatment. It's a good idea to take your anti-sickness tablets even if you don't feel sick after the first cycle, as this doesn't necessarily mean you won't feel sick or be sick another time.

There are lots of things that can be done to help manage these side effects, so make sure you let your medical team know if you are experiencing any. 24-hour telephone support will be available, so make sure you have the number to hand so that you can speak to someone if you're worried about anything.

Keeping a diary during treatment is a good way to keep track on how you're feeling and can make it easier to communicate your experience at hospital appointments. If you're asked to take your temperature every day to check for infection, you can record this in the diary. There's a link to a diary that you can use on the Peaches website.

We asked people who've been through chemotherapy for womb cancer to tell us about their experience, and what advice they would give to someone having chemotherapy.

### **[How did you manage the side effects of chemotherapy?]**

While the treatment itself is pain free — you're just sitting there with a drip in your arm — it's afterwards, the following day, or within a few days, when the side effects kick in that can be hard, dealing with those side effects, both physically and emotionally.

And then, as some of those side effects may improve, knowing that you are likely to go through some of it again when you have your next round of chemo, and that next time, they may be worse as your body gets weaker with the more chemo cycles you have. What kept me going was counting down the cycles and focusing on my end goal of ultimately being well again.

Each time before I left the hospital, I was given a bag full of various drugs to help combat the side effects, like anti-sickness and steroids. Before I started treatment, someone told me how I would come away with a bag of drugs and advised me to take whatever drugs were offered — and I think that's good advice, as it's good to have the drugs there with you at home so you can use them if you need to.

For me, side effects were being sick the first day or so after treatment, neuropathy in my feet, pain in my right knee joint, going off certain foods and drinks like tea which tasted really different, fatigue, and most noticeably losing my hair, not just my head hair but all my body hair — legs, pubic hair, under my arms, facial hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, nasal hair — my skin felt very different.

Thanks to the cold cap, I kept enough of my head hair not to need to wear a wig or scarf, but it was very thin, and it was still very upsetting, particularly after my second chemo cycle when large clumps of my hair were coming out when I was in the shower.

I prepared for my hair loss as soon as I possibly could, knowing that I would lose my hair. I contacted a lady who specialised in wigs for people that were having chemotherapy, and I was given a voucher by the hospital to put towards a wig. I had very long hair and I was advised that, maybe, to cut it a little bit shorter after the first treatment in preparation for losing it completely.

Approximately 10 days later, after my first chemotherapy treatment, my scalp became quite sore and my hair started to shed a little, so I decided to have it cut shorter. It was a really sad thing to happen, but we made it fun. I only had my short hair for a few days and then my scalp became quite sore, and the hair was shedding very quickly now, so I decided that I should have it shaved off, right before my second round of chemotherapy. So, my husband shaved my hair and, again, it just helped me prepare, ready for what was going to come.

I did wear my wig a little, and it was quite nice to have my long hair back. However, I embraced beautiful scarves and many little caps that are out there that you can buy. I also learnt how to apply my eyebrows — to draw them on. It just framed my face, and that's what I wanted.

There are many charities out there, for example, that show you how to apply your scarves to your head if you decide to wear a scarf for hair loss, and lots of different sorts of knots, and ways to tie it, to make you feel that your scarf is held securely, and looks quite stylish too.

Others teach you how to do your eyebrows, and to look after your skin, and to put make-up on. It's a really lovely opportunity to meet other people going through the same thing, and having make-up done, it just makes you feel... special.

It's grim, there's no getting away from that, and there are some days when you may feel really unwell — but it doesn't last forever, and you will get through it. Your body will recover in the months after you finish treatment — having my eyelashes and eyebrows come back really cheered me up.

**[Where can I find further information and support?]**

Further information about chemotherapy can be found on the Peaches website, alongside a checklist of things to bring with you when you have the treatment, put together by our Peaches community.