

Chemotherapy for Brain Tumours

Introduction

Chemotherapy is sometimes used in the treatment of Brain Tumours. Chemotherapy is treatment with drugs. It may be just one drug or several drugs depending on the type of tumour you have and the intended aims of the treatment.

Treating a Brain Tumour with chemotherapy is different from a tumour at other sites of the body.

A covering called the blood brain barrier surrounds the brain. This barrier can stop some drugs from reaching the brain tumour. This limits the number of drugs that can be used.

Often, to increase the effectiveness of the chemotherapy, a combination of drugs is used.

One of the most commonly used combinations is **PCV**. This is a combination of three drugs called: **Procarbazine**, **CCNU** and **Vincristine**. **PCV** is usually given every six weeks. Your doctor may use a slightly different combination and it may be helpful for the doctor or nurse to write down your specific treatment.

Chemotherapy may have side effects. If you are suffering with any of the symptoms in this leaflet you should contact your own doctor.

The side effects of PCV chemotherapy are outlined in this leaflet. However even if you are having a different combination (or even just one drug) it will give you an idea of what you may expect and advise you of what to do.

Procarbazine is taken orally and it can occasionally have some side effects: nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, flu-like symptoms, a rash or possibly some dizziness. These side effects do not last long because tolerance usually develops over a few days.

In addition you should be aware that you should **avoid** certain foods and drinks, for the time that you are taking the Procarbazine tablets (5-7 days). These include alcohol, cheese, yoghurt, sour cream, chicken livers, banana, avocado and meat prepared with tenderisers. Eating or drinking any of these **may cause an allergic reaction**.

Vincristine is given as an injection into a vein, usually into the back of your hand. The side effects associated with this drug can include; hair loss, constipation and over long term use it can cause tingling of fingers and toes or some muscle weakness.

CCNU is given in tablet form. This may cause nausea and vomiting. Usually an anti-sickness tablet is given to help with these side effects.

Many chemotherapy drugs can cause bone marrow suppression. This may result in you feeling tired and lethargic. **There is also an increased risk of infection and a susceptibility to bruising and bleeding.**

Your blood count will be checked regularly but **if you are feeling unwell please see your own doctor**. It may make you more susceptible to infection.

New treatments

There are a number of new chemotherapy drugs that are under research investigation. New treatments are used initially in **clinical trials**. These are studies that are designed to answer specific questions about the drug being used. In this way the effectiveness of the new drug can be assessed.

Your doctor may discuss these with you or you may hear about them from the press or television. Do not hesitate to ask for information and explanation by your doctor.