

## **Managing Anemia**

The following information is based on the general experiences of many prostate cancer patients.

Your experience may be different. If you have any questions about what prostate cancer treatment services are covered by your health insurance, please contact your health care provider or health insurance provider.

This education material was made possible by a Grant from the California Department of Justice, Antitrust Law Section, from litigation settlement funds to benefit Californians diagnosed with cancer or their families.

**Please feel free to read only those parts of the booklet you need now. You don't need to read everything right now. You can always read more later.**

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## What Will I Learn By Reading This Booklet?

When you have **chemotherapy** (key-mo-ther-a-pee) to control your prostate cancer, you may have **side effects** or unwanted changes in your body. Side effects are different from person to person, and may be different from one treatment to the next. Some people have no or very mild side effects. The good news is that there are ways to deal with most of the side effects. In this booklet you will learn:

- What **anemia** is
- Why chemotherapy can cause anemia
- How to know if you may have anemia
- How your doctor will treat your anemia
- Things you can do to help manage your anemia
- When to call your doctor

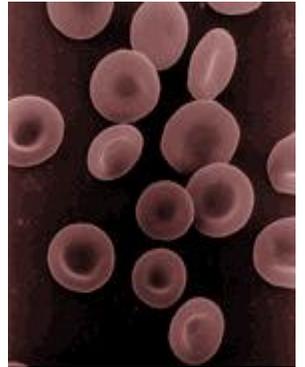
It is important for you to learn how to manage the side effects you may have from chemotherapy so that you can keep doing as many of your normal activities as possible.

Words that appear in **bold** (dark text) can be found in the “Key Words” section at the end of this booklet.

## What Is Anemia?

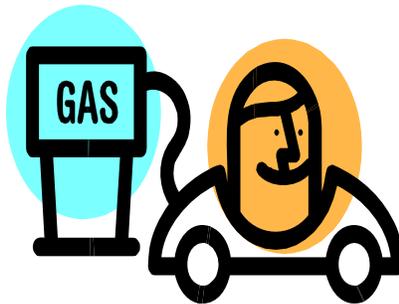
Your blood is made up of three kinds of blood cells:

- **White blood cells** help you fight infections.
- **Platelets** help your body stop bleeding when you cut yourself.
- **Red blood cells** carry oxygen from your lungs throughout your body.



Red Blood Cells

**Anemia** is when you do not have enough red blood cells to carry oxygen throughout your body. Your body needs fuel to run, just like a car. The oxygen your red blood cells carry is the fuel your body needs to stay active.



## **Why Does Chemotherapy Cause Anemia?**

Anemia is a very common side effect or unwanted change in your body that can happen when you have chemotherapy to control your prostate cancer. Anemia happens because the **anticancer** medicines you take can affect the healthy cells in your body, including your blood cells. The anemia you may get from your chemotherapy treatment can cause you to feel tired or short of breath when you are active. This may make you feel frustrated and hopeless. You are not alone. Anemia caused by chemotherapy treatment will get better. Your red blood cell count should go back to normal when your treatment is over. The important thing to remember is that anemia caused by your chemotherapy can be treated.

## How Do I Know If I May Have Anemia?

Some signs of anemia are:

- Feeling fatigue or tiredness
- Being very pale
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Being very sensitive or in a very bad mood
- Shortness of breath
- Low blood pressure
- A rise in your heart rate or **respiration** (how quickly you are breathing)

If you have any of these signs talk to your doctor or health care team. If your doctor finds that you have anemia, there are medicines and treatments that can help you feel better.

It is important that you talk to your doctor or health care team about any side effects you may have during or after your treatment. Your health care team can help treat these problems.

## How May My Anemia Be Treated?

During your chemotherapy treatment your doctor will ask you to have blood tests. These blood tests tell your doctor how your body is doing. When you have a blood test, a nurse or technician will take a small amount of blood from your arm with a needle. The blood tests will tell your doctor if your red blood cell count is low. If your red blood cell count is too low, your doctor may stop your chemotherapy until your red blood cell count is higher. The good news is that anemia caused by your chemotherapy is treatable.



**Getting a blood test**

Your doctor may give you medications to treat your anemia. Your doctor may also order a **blood transfusion** for your anemia. A blood transfusion is when you are given red blood cells donated by another person. The blood that you are given is tested to make sure that it is healthy. When you have a blood transfusion a bag (or unit) of blood is given to you through an I.V. (a plastic tube going into a vein in your arm which gives you any fluids or medicine you might need). A blood transfusion will help your body until it can make more red blood cells.

## What Can I Do To Manage My Anemia?

Just as every cancer patient's treatment is different, how anemia affects each person is also different. However, there are things you can do to help deal with this treatment side effect.

- Sleep more at night and take short naps or rest during the day if you can.

Feeling tired is one of the most common side effects of anemia.

- Try to plan your day so that light activities (eating, sitting, watching television, or reading) are spaced between activities that take more of your energy (going to the doctor, walking around the block, or going to a family gathering).

- Naps can be good if they last for short amounts of time (not longer than 30 to 40 minutes at a time). Be sure to get up and move around between them.



- Drink plenty of fluids, at least 8 eight-ounce glasses of water each day. This will help keep you from feeling dizzy when you stand or sit up. It also will help your muscles feel stronger.



- Remember to stand up slowly from sitting or lying down. This helps keep you from getting dizzy.

- Let other people help you do some of your normal daily activities like grocery shopping, laundry or cleaning your home.
- Speak with your boss to see if you can work part-time or flexible hours.
- Eat a health diet to keep up your strength. Speak to your doctor or health care team about what to eat.
- Speak to your doctor or health care team about medicines you can take to help manage your anemia.

### **Plan For Managing Your Anemia**

- Who is going to help you with your daily activities like grocery shopping or doing the laundry? List their name and contact information:

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- What foods can you eat to help strengthen your body?

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- How do you get in touch with your doctor or health care team if you need help?

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## When Should I Call My Doctor?

You should call your doctor if you:

- Are too tired to get out of bed for more than a 24-hour period
- Become confused
- Get dizzy, lose your balance or fall
- Have a problem catching your breath
- Have chest pains



If you have any of these signs talk to your doctor or health care team. There are medicines and treatments that can help you feel better. It is important that you talk to your doctor or health care team about any side effects you may have during or after your treatment. Your health care team can help treat these problems.

<b>Doctor's Name</b>	
<b>Doctor's office phone number</b>	
<b>Doctor's pager</b>	

## **What Have I Learned By Reading This?**

In this booklet, you learned about:

- What anemia is
- Why chemotherapy can cause anemia
- How to know if you may have anemia
- How your doctor will treat your anemia
- Things you can do to help manage your anemia
- When to call your doctor

If you have any questions, please talk to your doctor or health care team. It is important that you understand what is going on with your prostate cancer treatment. This knowledge will help you take better care of yourself and feel more in control so that you can get the most from your treatment.

## Key Words

**Anemia:** when you do not have enough red blood cells to carry oxygen throughout your body.

**Anticancer:** medicines used in the treatment of cancer.

**Blood transfusion:** when you get blood donated by another person.

**Chemotherapy (key-mo-ther-a-pee):** a prostate cancer treatment, which treats your whole body with powerful anticancer medicines to kill many of your prostate cancer cells.

**Fatigue:** mental or physical tiredness.

**I.V. or intravenous (in-truh-vee-nuhs):** a plastic tube going into a vein in your arm, which gives you any fluids or medicine, you might need.

**Platelets:** cells in your blood that help stop bleeding.

**Red Blood Cells:** cells in your blood that carry oxygen from your lungs throughout your body.

**Respiration:** how quickly you are breathing.

**Side Effects:** unwanted changes in your body caused by your prostate cancer treatment.

**Unit:** a pint of blood given to you during a blood transfusion.

**White Blood Cells:** cells in your blood that help you fight infection.