

What do I need to know about alcohol and drugs while undergoing treatment?

Relax - this isn't another "just say no" lecture. This is about understanding that as you get older, you have more rights and responsibilities. This is about having the facts to make informed decisions about your body and health.

Can I cigarette smoke while I'm having chemotherapy?

Smoking while receiving treatment places your body under additional stresses, especially your heart and lungs. Smokers are also at more risk of developing infections while receiving chemotherapy. There is no doubt about it...smoking is unhealthy. For some specific cancers and treatments risks to your health are even higher if a smoker. We strongly recommend that you quit smoking and will assist you in anyway we can. In addition to the immediate impacts of smoking while undergoing treatment it also places you at higher risk of developing a secondary cancer later in life. Yet another reason to quit.

Can I drink alcohol while I'm receiving treatment?

While most chemotherapy drugs are not affected by drinking alcohol, many other medications we give you should not be taken with alcohol. Medications such as pain killers and anti-nausea medications may interact with alcohol, causing reactions.

Alcohol is known to dehydrate you, as does your chemotherapy. This giving you what you may know as a 'hang over'. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea are common side effects of chemotherapy, and are also direct causes of dehydration. Add alcohol into the mix, and the dehydration effect may be worsened. You could end up feeling a lot worse than you need to.

Our recommendation is to avoid drinking alcohol while undergoing treatment or at least restrict it to special occasions. On special occasions stopping at one or two drinks, certainly avoid becoming intoxicated. However it is best to speak with your doctor/nurse about this issue.

Can I smoke cannabis while receiving treatment?

(marijuana, pot, grass, dope, weed, joint)

Cannabis, unlike cigarettes, is not processed in a factory and therefore can contain a dangerous mould, called 'aspergillus' as part of the growing process. In addition to inhaling the cannabis smoke you can also inhale the aspergillus mould your lungs. As you are aware, chemotherapy drugs slow down the body's immune system, so it can't fight the mould effectively. The mould can potentially develop into a fungal infection. Fungal infections can be difficult to treat and can result in delaying or stopping your treatment and even worse result in death.

What about other recreational drugs?

Strongly advised not to take any recreational drugs while on treatment as this will only add extra stress to your body.

A question to ask your doctor?

What affect will my specific treatment have on consuming substances?

It can be hard to give up or cut down on some of these substances. We can help in a number of ways, please talk to us about some of these options. We can offer anything from patches for smoking addiction, to advise on how to overcome the pressures of your friends while out socialising.