



## Penile Cancer information sheet

### Radiotherapy and Chemotherapy (for non localised cancer)

For further information on life after treatment,  
please refer to Orchid's main booklet:  
Penile Cancer; What you need to know.

Orchid is dedicated to supporting men with a diagnosis of penile cancer. This information sheet describes a particular treatment men may have along with any special care and tips we think may be helpful.



Orchid has a  
**Male Cancer Helpline**  
manned by specialist nurses on  
**0808 802 0010**  
or email  
**helpline@orchid-cancer.org.uk**

## Radiotherapy

If penile cancer has spread beyond the penis and has affected other areas of the body such as lymph nodes, a combination of both surgery to remove the lymph nodes followed by external beam radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy may be recommended.

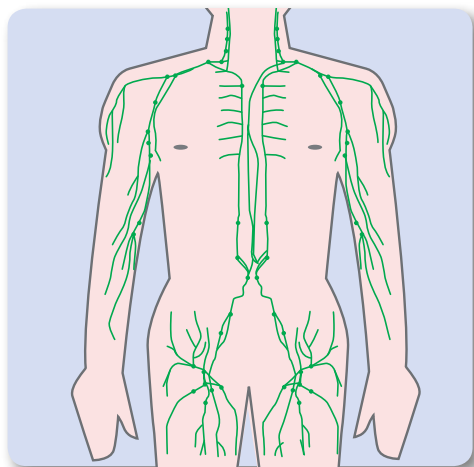
Radiotherapy and chemotherapy can also be used independently in cases of more advanced penile cancer:

### External beam radiotherapy

External beam radiotherapy (radiotherapy from outside the body) directs radiation at the cancer. It can also shrink areas of cancer which are affecting specific areas of the body and help provide relief from symptoms such as pain or discomfort.

### What are lymph nodes?

The human body is covered by a special type of drainage system called the lymphatic drainage system (see diagram). This system is responsible for transporting excess fluid from the organs and tissues of the body as a fluid called lymph. Lymph fluid will contain various types of cells and substances that are no longer needed. The lymph fluid will pass through small nodules or nodes that act as filters removing these substances. Cancer cells can also travel in the lymph fluid and as a result may affect other areas of the body.



## Possible side effects related to radiotherapy treatment

### Fatigue

This may be caused by a combination of both treatment and travel. Getting small restful naps or taking a prescribed mild sedative medication may help.

### Skin reactions

Radiotherapy can sometimes irritate the sensitive skin around the penis delaying the healing process. Vitamin E supplements and topical creams can aid the healing process and these may be prescribed by the healthcare team. It is also advisable to keep areas that have been exposed to radiotherapy covered and protected from direct sunlight.

## Lymphoedema

Radiotherapy can sometimes cause lymphoedema. Lymphoedema occurs when lymph fluid (which flows around the body in one direction) accumulates in the groin area and prevents adequate drainage to the lower extremities (usually the legs). This can cause the leg(s) to swell. It can sometimes also affect the

penis and scrotum. Lymphoedema is treated by a specialist team of healthcare professionals who may perform gentle massage of the surrounding lymph nodes to help promote a normal flow of the lymph fluid. This type of therapy may be used in conjunction with the application of special surgical support dressings and may take several months.

To help prevent possible lymphoedema following surgery or in the future it is extremely important to ensure meticulous skin hygiene.

- ▶ Try and avoid scratches or bites to the legs, for instance from insects (use insect repellent) or pets. For any scratch no matter how small, it is advisable to wash the area with soap and water and use an antiseptic cream such as Savlon to minimize infection. If the area becomes red, painful or swollen men will need to see their GP to rule out possible infection and may need to be prescribed antibiotics.
- ▶ Try and keep vulnerable areas covered.
- ▶ Avoid sunburn to the area. Ensure a high factor sun block is always used if exposure to strong sunlight is expected.
- ▶ Use an electric razor to shave legs.
- ▶ Avoid inoculations and injections in the affected leg. This includes complementary treatments such as acupuncture.
- ▶ To keep a healthy blood circulation which will help transport lymph fluid normally, avoid wearing tight garments such as socks or trousers that may restrict blood flow.
- ▶ Try and avoid becoming overweight and standing still for excessive periods of time.
- ▶ Try and remember not to cross legs which may compromise normal blood and lymph circulation.

# Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is the use of drugs to kill cancer cells. The type of chemotherapy which is administered directly into the blood stream to treat non-localised penile cancer is called systemic chemotherapy.

Possible chemotherapy drugs that may be used are Cisplatin, 5-Fluorouracil (infusion) and Docataxel. They will usually be administered in "cycles". Cycles are patterns of administering certain drugs over a period of days which are then repeated over a period of weeks or months.

Like all medical treatments, chemotherapy can have side effects. These will differ from individual to individual and not everyone will experience the same symptoms.

If men are receiving or going to receive chemotherapy, the advice in the table below on how to reduce or manage the potential side effects may be helpful.

## Chemotherapy effects

While chemotherapy drugs are attacking cancer cells they may temporarily reduce the number of normal healthy cells. When these are reduced men may be more at risk of infection and will tire easily.

Men should let the specialist team know if they begin to feel unwell at any time during treatment.

If necessary, antibiotics may be given to treat any infection.

The chemotherapy usually used for penile cancer does not tend to make hair fall out.

The effects of chemotherapy may take some time to subside after treatment. If men feel that they need help and support during their treatment, their specialist medical team can refer them to the necessary services including counselling. Please refer to Orchid's main booklet *Penile Cancer; What you need to know* for information about support and adjusting to life during and after treatment.

### Common side effects of chemotherapy:

#### Nausea and vomiting

- Try**
- Anti sickness medication may be given to ease these symptoms. They can usually be given on a regular basis
  - Ginger beer, ginger tea or ginger biscuits (eat and drink regularly throughout the day)
  - Peppermint tea, always drink slowly taking lots of sips
  - A small meal a few hours before chemo starts

#### Never have chemotherapy on an empty stomach

- Avoid**
- Hot and spicy foods (curry, Cajun cooking etc.)
  - Foods with high sugar content
  - Fatty and greasy foods (chips, burgers etc.)
  - Large meals
  - Eating and drinking too fast and drinking with meals
  - Alcohol
  - Caffeine which is found in tea/coffee/chocolate including chocolate bars/energy drinks
  - Baby food, this has very little nutrition for adults!

## Common side effects of chemotherapy:

<b>Taste</b> (chemotherapy can cause a metallic taste in the mouth)	<b>Try</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fresh pineapple or other sharp-tasting fruit</li><li>• Boiled sweets while having treatment</li><li>• Seasoning or marinating meals to add flavour</li><li>• Using herbs and spices in cooking to add stronger taste</li></ul>
<b>Mouth sores or ulcers from chemotherapy</b>	<b>Try</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fresh pineapple can help prevent and heal mouth ulcers by stimulating saliva which protects the mouth</li><li>• Bonjela</li><li>• Soft child's/baby bristle toothbrush</li><li>• Baby or soothing (for instance aloe vera) toothpaste</li><li>• Soft puréed or liquid diet to prevent chewing</li><li>• Rinsing the mouth with salt water 4-5 times a day</li><li>• Sucking crushed ice during treatment</li><li>• Artificial saliva which can be prescribed by the specialist team</li><li>• Vaseline for the lips</li></ul> <b>Avoid</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tomato and citrus fruit based products and tobacco</li><li>• Oral care products that may cause a dry mouth and products that contain alcohol or peroxide</li><li>• Hot and spicy foods (curry, Cajun etc.)</li><li>• Nuts and seeds</li></ul>
<b>Tiredness</b>	<b>Try</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Getting small restful naps</li><li>• Meditating, some people find this beneficial</li><li>• Sleeping tablets which can be prescribed for insomnia</li></ul>
<b>Loss of appetite</b>	<b>Try</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Small frequent meals throughout the day</li><li>• Fortified soups/drinks or milk shakes</li></ul>
<b>Diarrhoea</b>	<b>Try</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rice, pasta and potatoes with skins</li><li>• Dry crackers/biscuits</li><li>• White bread</li><li>• Bananas (a good source of potassium, essential for the body's metabolism. Excessive diarrhoea will deplete potassium levels)</li></ul> <b>Avoid</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High fibre foods (bran, fruit, nuts etc.)</li></ul>

## Clinical trials and current research

Clinical trials are used to improve ways of treating cancer. They are also used to look at ways of reducing possible side effects of treatment. Men being treated for non-localised penile cancer may be asked if they wish to take part in a clinical trial. If they decide they would like to take part they can still opt out of the trial in the future without affecting subsequent medical care or future treatment.

Research into newer treatments for penile cancer that are currently being investigated include:

### Targeted therapy

Targeted therapy is a treatment that targets the cancer's specific genes or substances that make it cancerous and cause it to grow.

Treatment is experimental but involves using chemicals such as chemotherapy to target specific cancer cells or new chemical substances to alter or kill specific areas of the cancer cell.

### Radiosensitizers

Radiosensitizers are drugs that make tumour cells more sensitive to radiation therapy, making it more effective.

### Combination therapy

Researchers are studying whether the combination of chemotherapy and radiation therapy better reduces the risk of recurrence and/or increases survival compared with standard treatments.

## Metastatic penile cancer

Cancer that has spread to other areas or organs in the body is called metastatic disease. Although it may not be possible to cure cancer in this situation, it may be possible to slow its progression by using radiotherapy or chemotherapy.

In this situation, care and treatment will be managed by a number of health professionals who will work together to give men the best possible quality of life.

### Further information

For further information on the possible effects of chemotherapy or radiotherapy, please go to: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk) or telephone **0808 808 0000**.

PLEASE REFER TO ORCHID'S BOOKLET  
*PENILE CANCER; WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW*  
FOR FURTHER ADVICE AND ADJUSTING TO LIFE AFTER SURGERY

## Important contact numbers

Specialist Nurse contact no.:

District Nurse contact no.:

Men always need to make sure that the contact details of the specialist team are at hand should they need to contact them prior to follow-up appointments.

## Resources...

For further information and support on male cancer, please visit the Orchid website at [www.orchid-cancer.org.uk](http://www.orchid-cancer.org.uk)

Orchid has produced a series of leaflets and factsheets on specific issues relating to male cancer which can be downloaded from the website.

*Low-down*, Orchid's newsletter, features the latest news and developments in male cancer including research, treatments, new services and events.

## Written and edited by:

Orchid Cancer Appeal and  
Orchid Editorial Board  
March 2019  
To be reviewed 2020

References to sources of information used in this booklet are available from Orchid. If you would like to comment on the information included in the booklet or make suggestions about future editions Orchid would like to hear your feedback.

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**Male Cancer Helpline**  
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Orchid is the UK's leading charity dedicated to supporting men and their families who are affected by male-specific cancers: testicular, prostate and penile.

Established in 1996 by a young testicular cancer patient and the oncologist who saved his life, Orchid works to improve the lives of people affected by male cancers through a world class research programme, educational campaigns and raising awareness and an extensive support service.

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### ORCHID

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