

Patient information factsheet

Intraperitoneal chemotherapy (IPEC) combined with surgery

We have given you this factsheet because we feel you may benefit from a special type of cancer treatment called intraperitoneal chemotherapy (IPEC) at the time of your surgery. It explains what IPEC is, what the procedure involves and what the possible side effects are. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. Please read it carefully and if you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our team.

What is IPEC?

IPEC is a type of chemotherapy (medicine used to kill cancer cells) used to treat advanced forms of cancer that have spread to the lining of the abdominal cavity. If left untreated, these forms of cancer can cause:

- blockages of the bowel
- pain
- infection
- a build-up of fluid in the abdomen

IPEC is used as an alternative, or in addition to, standard tablet or intravenous chemotherapy (delivered through a needle into your vein). Unlike tablet or intravenous chemotherapy, IPEC delivers chemotherapy directly into your abdomen.

We usually combine IPEC with surgery to remove any solid tumours. This is because not all tumour cells are visible and some may still remain after the entire tumour has been surgically removed. IPEC works hand-in-hand with your surgery to try to destroy these remaining tumour cells and provide better results.

Depending on the chemotherapy drug we use, IPEC may be heated (HIPEC) because heat damages tumour cells more than normal cells and improves the effect of the drug.

What does the procedure involve?

The surgical procedure will be carried out under general anaesthetic (medicine used to send you to sleep, so you are unaware of surgery and do not move or feel pain while it is being carried out).

During your procedure, we will remove the lining of your abdomen and any other areas affected by cancer. We may also remove other areas which are at risk of developing cancer. After these areas have been removed, we will then gently heat the chemotherapy before putting it into your abdomen via a tube connected to a pump. We will leave the chemotherapy in place for around 60 to 90 minutes to give it time to work. We will then wash the chemotherapy away before closing the surgical cut to complete the procedure.

What are the benefits?

IPEC allows for a higher concentration of chemotherapy to be delivered into the abdomen more effectively and safely than standard intravenous chemotherapy.

This type of chemotherapy is best at destroying small cancer cells that may have been left behind after surgery.

Chemotherapy delivered through IPEC causes fewer side effects than intravenous chemotherapy. This is because it only targets cancer cells in your abdomen, rather than your whole body.

Evidence suggests that pairing surgery and IPEC together is more beneficial than chemotherapy alone and can offer:

- increased survival rates
- relief of symptoms
- reduced risk of cancer coming back
- improvements in day-to-day life

Your healthcare team will explain in more detail the benefits they are hoping this treatment will offer you, and answer any questions you may have.

Are there any side effects?

Chemotherapy affects people in different ways and it is hard to know exactly how you will react to it. Common side effects from IPEC include:

Nausea and vomiting

The severity of this will vary from person to person and occurs in up to one in ten people. We will give you anti-sickness medication to help ease your symptoms. We may also pass a thin tube down through your nose into your stomach to reduce your risk of vomiting.

Tiredness

Some chemotherapy drugs may make you feel tired and lacking in energy. You will need plenty of time to rest after your treatment and it will be a while before you reach your usual energy levels.

Delayed healing

Some chemotherapy drugs may slow down how long it takes you to heal after your surgery.

Infection

As with any surgical procedure, there is a risk of infection. Chemotherapy drugs can increase this risk, as by reducing the number of immune cells in your body, they lower your ability to fight infection.

Fistula

A fistula is an abnormal opening that connects two or more organs or spaces inside or outside the body. For example, a fistula can develop between the bowel and the bladder, or between the bowel and the skin.

Cancer fistulas are rare. They are more common in the pelvic area (lower tummy between your hips) but can develop in other parts of the body. They can be caused by cancer treatment, and may take many months or years to develop. Less commonly, they are caused by cancer growing into an area of the body.

When chemotherapy and surgery are combined, the possibility of a fistula forming is increased. If this occurs, you may require a longer stay in hospital and another operation to correct the damage.

Patient information factsheet

Risk to life

With any major operation there is a risk to life. However, the addition of chemotherapy drugs during your surgery can increase this risk.

Your surgeon will discuss the risks and possible side effects with you and answer any questions you may have.

All of these side effects listed are only possible side effects. You may not experience any side effects at all.

Will I definitely be given IPEC?

No. Once your surgery is underway, there may be certain technical factors or findings that prevent us from treating your cancer with IPEC. If this is the case, we will discuss this with you in more detail after your surgery.

What happens next?

This treatment is usually only suitable for a small number of people. This is because you need to be well enough for the surgery.

If your cancer is suitable to be treated with IPEC, your surgeon and oncologist will discuss this option with you in more detail.

If you decide to have this treatment, we will ask you to sign a consent form to confirm you are happy to proceed with the procedure.

What happens after the procedure?

After your procedure, we will move you to the intensive care department to recover.

Your recovery time will depend on the type of surgery you have had. You may need to stay in hospital for a few days.

We will plan your follow-up care based on the type of cancer you have.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the nurse specialists caring for you.

Useful links

www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/treatments-and-drugs/hipec

www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/fistula

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