



## A CLIENT CARE MODULE: CARING FOR CLIENTS DURING CHEMO



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*A Client Care Module:*  
**CARING FOR CLIENTS DURING CHEMO**

We hope you enjoy this inservice, prepared by registered nurses especially for caregivers like you!

## Instructions for the Learner

*If you are studying the inservice on your own, please do the following:*

- Read through **all** the material. You may find it useful to have a highlighting marker nearby as you read. Highlight any information that is new to you or that you feel is especially important.
- If you have questions about anything you read, please ask your supervisor.
- Take the quiz. Think about each statement and pick the best answer.
- Check with your supervisor for the right answers. You need **8 correct** to pass!
- Print your name, write in the date, and then sign your name.
- Email In the Know at [feedback@knowingmore.com](mailto:feedback@knowingmore.com) with your comments and/or suggestions for improving this inservice.

**THANK YOU!**

**After finishing this inservice, you will be able to:**

*Describe how chemotherapy helps treat cancer.*



*Discuss how chemo damages healthy cells in the body and how that damage leads to the common side effects of chemo.*



*List at least six common side effects of chemo and describe how to help clients with those side effects.*



*Prepare to help clients with the emotional toll chemo can take during treatment.*



*Demonstrate empathetic communication skills with clients before, during and after chemo treatment.*



A Client Care Module:  
**Caring for Clients During Chemo**

**Inside This Inservice:**

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**In accordance with industry standards, this inservice material expires on December 31, 2022. After that date, you may purchase a current copy of the materials by calling 877-809-5515.**

## IF CANCER WAS A DANDELION

Imagine a beautiful public park surrounded by a lush, green lawn. In order to protect the tender blades of grass, pristine walkways are maintained throughout the park and signs warn visitors to "keep off the grass."

One day the caretaker, a serious fellow with years of experience, notices that a single dandelion has poked through his perfect patch of grass. Carefully, he crosses the field and plucks it out.

A few days later, two more dandelions take its place. So, the caretaker prepares a bottle of weed killer and once again, crosses the lawn. He sprays the weed killer directly onto the dandelions and down in to the earth to poison the roots.

Within a week, dandelions appear all over the lawn. The caretaker must make a decision. He knows the only way to get rid of all the dandelions is to spray the entire field with weed killer. But he also knows that the weed killer may damage some of the healthy grass in the process.

If the dandelion was cancer, plucking it out of the ground would be like having surgery. Spraying just the root is like receiving radiation. Spraying the entire field is similar to having **chemotherapy**

The most efficient way to get rid of all the dandelions is to spray the entire field. And, sometimes, chemotherapy is the best way to get rid of all the cancer.

Unfortunately, as the weed killer gets rid of the dandelions, it also damages some of the healthy grass. And while chemotherapy gets rid of cancer cells, it can also damage healthy cells at the same time.

**Keep reading to learn all about caring for clients during chemo. You'll discover exactly what chemotherapy is, what it does and how it affects the person receiving it.**



# WHAT EXACTLY IS CHEMOTHERAPY?

**Chemotherapy** (chemo for short) is a drug—or combination of drugs—that destroys cancer cells. It works by stopping or slowing the growth of quickly growing cells.

***CANCER is the term used for diseases in which abnormal cells grow, divide and invade other tissues quickly and without control.***

Unfortunately, chemo can also harm healthy cells that divide quickly, such as those that line the mouth and intestines or cells that cause hair to grow. It's this damage to healthy cells that causes the common side effects of chemo, including nausea, vomiting and hair loss.



**Depending on the type of cancer and how advanced it is, chemo can:**

- **Cure.** In the early stages of the disease, chemo can completely eliminate cancer from the body.
- **Control.** Chemo can keep cancer from spreading to other parts of the body.
- **Ease symptoms (palliative care).** Chemo can shrink tumors that are causing pain or pressure.



***There are more than 50 different chemo drugs available that can be prescribed in countless combinations, doses and schedules.*** Chemo treatment is a little bit different for every individual. It depends on the type of cancer, the location and how advanced it is.

Most people receive chemo in *cycles*. A cycle is a period of chemotherapy treatment followed by a period of rest. For example, a client might receive 1 week of chemotherapy followed by 3 weeks of rest. This 4 week time period makes up one cycle. The rest period gives the client's body a chance to build new healthy cells.

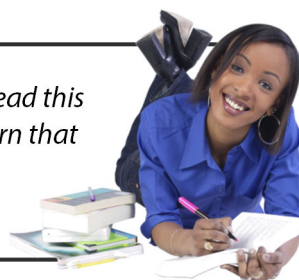


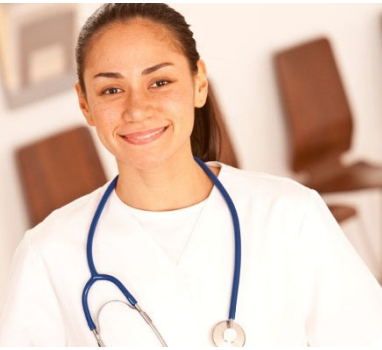
## The Facts

- About 1.7 million men and women will be diagnosed with cancer each year and, sadly, nearly 600,000 of them will die.
- The average age to receive a diagnosis for cancer (of any type) is 66 years of age.
- The American Cancer Society estimates that, every year, nearly 175,000 cancer deaths are caused by tobacco use alone, and one-third of all cancer deaths are caused by poor nutrition, physical inactivity and obesity.
- Early detection of cancer through screening has been determined to reduce the number of deaths from cancers of the skin, lung, colon, rectum, breast, and cervix.

## WHAT'S NEW?

Grab your favorite highlighter! As you read this inservice, **highlight five things** you learn that you didn't know before. Share this new information with your co-workers!





## WHAT EXCITES YOU?

Most chemo drugs kill any rapidly growing cell in the body, which leads to unpleasant side effects. So, it stands to reason that a better treatment would be a medicine that could target *only* cancer cells.

While that day isn't here yet, research into the **genetics of cancer cells** is moving things in the right direction.

For example, a drug called Herceptin targets cancer cells that have the "her2" gene turned on. This means Herceptin only goes after those cancer cells and leaves the healthy cells alone.

As many as 25% of breast cancers have the her2 gene turned on.

Current studies on Herceptin show astonishing results and no other cancer treatments are as effective!

## HOW IS CHEMO ADMINISTERED?

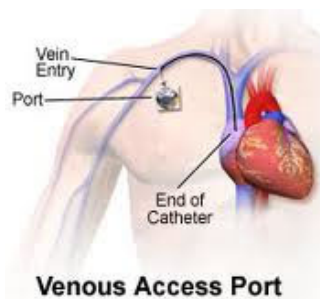
Chemotherapy may be given in many ways. Here are a few of the most common methods:

- **Topical.** Some chemo comes in a cream that can be rubbed onto the skin. This method is most commonly used for skin cancers.
- **Oral.** About a quarter of all new cancer drugs now being studied will become available in an oral form (pill, capsule or liquid). Some existing IV drugs also have oral versions. Oral forms of chemo give patients more freedom and control because they can be taken at home and require fewer office visits.
- **Injection.** Chemo may be given as a shot in a muscle, usually the upper arm, thigh or hip. It can also be given as a shot right under the skin in the fatty part of the arm, leg or belly.
- **Intravenous (IV).** The most common way chemo is given is through an IV where the drug goes directly into a vein.

### What you need to know about IV chemotherapy . . .

Some IV chemotherapy is given through a thin needle that is placed directly into a vein on the hand or lower arm. However, if the course is expected to last for a long time, IV chemotherapy will be given through a catheter or port.

- **Catheters.** A catheter is a soft, thin tube, placed by a surgeon into a large vein, often in the chest. One end of the catheter stays outside of the body so the drug can be injected into it. Most catheters stay in place until all chemo treatments are done.



- **Ports.** A port is a small, round disc that is implanted just under the skin, usually in the upper chest. A catheter connects the port to a large vein. A nurse can insert a needle into the port to give chemo or draw blood. Some ports are used for chemotherapy treatments that are given over the course of a few days.


**The most important thing you can do for clients with catheters and ports is to watch for and report any signs of infection, including:**

- Redness.
- Drainage with pus.
- Firmness.
- Swelling.
- Warmer than usual skin at the site.
- Tenderness at the site.
- Moderate to severe pain.
- Fever.

## COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF CHEMO

Side Effect	Why This Happens	How You Can Help
<p><b>Nausea &amp; Vomiting</b></p>	<p>Chemo drugs <b>irritate the lining</b> of the stomach and the small intestine. This stimulates certain nerves that activate the <i>vomiting center</i> in the brain, which can lead to nausea and vomiting.</p> <p>Chemo drugs can also <b>slow stomach emptying</b> which may also stimulate the vomiting center in the brain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer bland, easy-to-digest foods and drinks, such as plain crackers, toast, and gelatin. (See p. 9 for best foods to eat during chemo.)</li> <li>• Some people feel better when they eat a before chemo, while others feel better receiving the drug on an empty stomach. Follow your client's preference.</li> <li>• Serve 5 or 6 small meals and snacks instead of 3 larger meals a day.</li> <li>• Have popsicles, fruit ices, ice chips and/or sugar free candy available for your client to suck on.</li> <li>• Report right away if your client vomits regularly for longer than 24 hours after receiving treatment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mouth and Throat Changes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dry mouth.</li> <li>• Changes in taste and smell.</li> <li>• Gum infections.</li> <li>• Mouth sores.</li> </ul>	<p>Remember, chemo drugs harm the fast-growing cells of the cancer tumor. But they can also damage fast growing cells that line the mouth and throat.</p> <p>This can affect gums, the lining of the mouth and throat, and the glands that make saliva.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check your client's mouth and tongue <b>every day</b> for sores, white spots, or infections. Report any problems right away.</li> <li>• Help your client keep her mouth moist by sipping water, sucking on ice chips or sugar-free hard candy, or chewing sugar-free gum.</li> <li>• Perform mouth care after every meal with an <i>extra soft</i> toothbrush. Avoid mouthwashes that contain alcohol.</li> <li>• Recommend foods that are moist, soft, and easy to chew, such as cooked cereals, mashed potatoes, and scrambled eggs. (See p. 9 for more food options.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Changes in Appetite</b></p>	<p>Nausea and mouth and throat problems can lead to a decrease in appetite.</p> <p>Some chemo drugs can make food taste different or can cause a loss of taste all together, leading to a loss of appetite.</p> <p>People on chemo can also experience appetite changes as a result of feeling depressed or tired.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stick to a set schedule for eating. Encourage your client to eat when it is time to eat, rather than waiting to feel hungry.</li> <li>• Serve 5 to 6 small meals or snacks each day instead of 3 big meals.</li> <li>• Milkshakes, smoothies, juice or soup are great when your client does not feel like eating solid foods. Liquids like these can provide protein, vitamins and calories.</li> <li>• Report to your supervisor if your client cannot eat at all or if he or she begins to lose weight without trying.</li> </ul>

## COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF CHEMO, CONTINUED

Side Effect	Why This Happens	How You Can Help
<p><b>Fatigue</b> (Feeling weak, weary, worn out, heavy or slow.)</p>	<p>Fatigue can be caused by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anemia (see below)</li> <li>• Pain</li> <li>• Certain medications</li> <li>• Poor appetite</li> <li>• Trouble sleeping</li> <li>• Stress and anxiety</li> <li>• Depression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help your client relax and decrease stress. Some ways to do this include meditation, prayer and yoga.</li> <li>• Light activity can also ease fatigue. Help your client take a 15-minute walk or do light housekeeping duties like folding laundry or dusting tables.</li> <li>• Recommend your client take a planned, short nap during the day. Be sure the nap lasts less than one hour or it could interfere with nighttime sleep.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Anemia</b> (Having too few red blood cells to carry oxygen throughout the body.)</p>	<p>Some types of chemotherapy cause anemia because they make it harder for bone marrow to produce new red blood cells.</p> <p>Anemia can make people feel short of breath, weak, dizzy, faint or fatigued.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage clients with anemia to eat iron-rich foods, such as red meat, egg yolks, dark, leafy greens (spinach, collards, dried fruit (prunes, raisins), and iron-enriched cereals and grains.</li> <li>• Help your client stand up <i>slowly</i> to prevent dizziness.</li> </ul> 
<p><b>Bleeding &amp; Bruising</b> (Bleeding nose or mouth, or a rash of tiny, red dots.)</p>	<p>Chemotherapy can lower the number of platelets in the blood because it affects the bone marrow's ability to make them.</p> <p>Platelets are the cells that make blood clot and help stop bleeding.</p> <p>A low platelet count is called <i>thrombocytopenia</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a soft toothbrush for mouth care. Avoid flossing.</li> <li>• Men should use an electric razor to shave.</li> <li>• Make sure your client wears shoes to walk, even in the house.</li> <li>• If a cut or scrape happens, apply gentle pressure until the bleeding stops.</li> <li>• Report right away if your client becomes constipated. A stool softener may be needed to prevent rectal bleeding.</li> </ul>

## MORE COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF CHEMO

Side Effect	Why This Happens	How You Can Help
<b>Hair Loss</b>	<p>Some chemo drugs damage the cells that cause hair to grow. About 2 to 3 weeks after chemo begins, the scalp may begin to feel tender. Then the hair may begin to fall out. It may fall out a little at a time or in clumps.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassure your client that her hair will likely begin to grow back 2 to 3 months after chemotherapy is over.</li> <li>• If the idea of hair loss is extremely troubling, help your client make plans to choose a wig and/or scarves <i>before</i> starting chemo treatments.</li> <li>• Use a mild shampoo, such as a baby shampoo to wash hair and scalp. Gently pat hair dry with a soft towel.</li> <li>• Remind clients with hair loss to protect their scalps by wearing a hat or scarf when outside.</li> </ul>
<b>Skin and Nail Changes</b>	<p>Some types of chemo damage the fast-growing cells in skin and nails. While it may be painful and annoying, most skin and nail problems are minor, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Itching, dryness, redness, rashes, and peeling.</li> <li>• Sensitivity to the sun.</li> <li>• Darkened, yellow, brittle and cracked nails.</li> <li>• Nails may even loosen and fall off.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use cornstarch as a dusting powder.</li> <li>• Pat (do not rub) skin dry after bathing.</li> <li>• Wash with a mild, moisturizing soap.</li> <li>• Apply fragrance-free cream or lotion while skin is still damp after washing.</li> <li>• Add colloidal oatmeal powder (such as Aveeno) to bath water when your client's whole body itches.</li> <li>• Help your client avoid direct sunlight and use sunscreen when outside.</li> <li>• Suggest your client protect her skin and nails by wearing gloves when/if washing dishes or doing yard work.</li> </ul>
<b>Pain</b>	<p>Pain can be caused by the cancer itself or by chemo.</p> <p>Some chemo drugs can cause burning, numbness, and tingling or shooting pains in the hands and feet. Mouth sores, headaches, muscle pains, and stomach pains are also possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report any changes in pain right away. There are medications available to help with most types of pain.</li> <li>• Before reporting your clients pain, ask where it hurts, what it feels like, where the pain is on a scale of 1 to 10 and what he or she has tried to help relieve the pain.</li> <li>• For clients who have pain most of the time, it's important to take pain medicine on a regular schedule even when not in pain. Pain will be harder to control if the client waits until he or she is in pain before taking medicine.</li> <li>• Deep breathing and yoga can help reduce muscle tension, anxiety and pain.</li> </ul>



## MORE COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF CHEMO, CONTINUED

Side Effect	Why This Happens	How You Can Help
<b>Urinary System Changes</b>	<p>Some types of chemo damage cells in the kidneys and bladder and may cause:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burning or pain when urinating.</li> <li>• Frequent urination.</li> <li>• Incontinence.</li> <li>• Blood in the urine.</li> <li>• Orange, red or dark yellow urine that has a strong medicine odor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage your client to drink plenty of clear fluids while receiving chemotherapy. Good choices include water, fruit juices, clear sodas and decaffeinated tea.</li> <li>• Limit beverages that contain caffeine as they can irritate the bladder and make extra work for the kidneys.</li> <li>• Report right away if your client is experiencing pain with urination or if you notice blood in the urine as these can be signs of infection.</li> </ul>
<b>Nervous System Changes</b>	<p>Some chemo drugs can cause damage to the nervous system. Symptoms may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tingling, burning, weakness, or numbness in hands or feet.</li> <li>• Clumsiness or feeling off-balance.</li> <li>• Shaking or trembling.</li> <li>• Confusion and memory problems.</li> <li>• Dizziness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report any nervous system changes right away. It is important to treat these symptoms as soon as possible to prevent more serious or long term problems.</li> <li>• Provide assistance with ambulation, even if the person didn't need assistance before the chemo. Teach your client to walk slowly and to hold onto handrails when using the stairs.</li> <li>• Secure or remove area rugs. Cover or re-route electric cords that cross over walkways.</li> </ul>
<b>Immune System Changes</b>	<p>Some types of chemotherapy make it harder for bone marrow to produce new white blood cells. White blood cells help the body fight infection.</p> <p>One important type of white blood cell is called a <u>neutrophil</u>. A low neutrophil count is called <b>neutropenia</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow strict handwashing procedures when caring for clients with neutropenia. Teach clients to wash their own hands before eating, after using the bathroom and after coughing, sneezing or touching animals.</li> <li>• Limit your client's exposure to people with colds or flu and avoid large crowds.</li> <li>• Remind clients with neutropenia not to clean their cat's litter box, pick up dog waste or clean bird cages.</li> <li>• Severely neutropenic patients may be advised to avoid fresh fruits, vegetables and flowers.</li> </ul>

## THE EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF CHEMO

Chemotherapy treatment almost always creates major changes in a person's life. You just learned about the physical toll it can take on the body, but chemo can also disrupt daily routines, add stress to family relationships and lead to fear, sadness, anxiety and depression.

Just as there are ways to cope with the physical side effects of chemo, there are also things you can do to help clients with emotional side effects.

### Here are a few things you can do to help:

- Help your client keep the *treatment goals* in mind. This may help him stay strong when things get rough.
- Encourage a healthy and balanced diet. Your client's body needs food to rebuild tissues, regain strength and deal with emotional side effects.
- Urge clients to learn as much as they *want* to know about their disease and treatment. For some, this knowledge can decrease the fear of the unknown and increase feelings of control and empowerment.
- Help your client get some form of exercise on a daily basis. Walking, swimming, stretching, yoga or even light housework can help fight fatigue, increase appetite and improve self image.
- Suggest clients on chemo keep a daily journal during treatment. Writing down activities and thoughts helps some people better understand the feelings they experience.
- Persuade clients to keep up hobbies they love or to try something new. Hobbies can help pass the time and create a diversion from any pain or other unpleasant side effects your client may be experiencing.
- Remind your client to take it easy. He may not have as much energy as usual so rest and relaxation are important. Give your client "permission" to let the small stuff slide and only do the things that are most important.
- Help your client locate a support group. Support groups are made up of people who share a common experience. Many people with cancer find they can share thoughts and feelings with group members more easily than with anyone else. Talk to a social worker, call your local hospital, or search online for resources.



## TALK ABOUT IT!

### IS IT CHEMO BRAIN?

Research shows that some chemo drugs can cause changes in the brain that lead to distressing (yet temporary) mental changes.

### Does your client on chemo have trouble:

- Remembering?
- Concentrating?
- Finding the right word?
- Doing two things at once, like answering the phone while cooking?

Although the symptoms of "chemo brain" tend to clear up after treatment is complete, the experience can be quite upsetting.

Brain "exercises" can help keep your client's mind sharp during this time.

### Think of at least three things you can do to help your client exercise his brain.

(Examples may include doing crossword puzzles, reading and/or keeping a journal.)

**Share your ideas with your supervisor and co-workers!**



## FIVE KEY POINTS!

### REVIEW WHAT YOU LEARNED!

1. Cancer is the term used for diseases in which abnormal cells grow, divide and invade other tissues quickly and without control.
2. Chemo drugs destroy cancer cells by stopping or slowing the growth of quickly growing cells.
3. Healthy, non-cancer cells in the body also grow quickly. When these cells are destroyed by the chemo drug, side effects such as hair loss, vomiting and loss of appetite occur.
4. Helping clients manage the physical and emotional side effects of chemo is linked to the overall success of treatment.
5. Helping clients keep their treatment goals in mind can help them stay strong when the side effects become difficult.

# BEST FOODS TO EAT DURING CHEMO

## LIQUIDS

*(To help with vomiting)*

- Water
- Broth
- Apple or cranberry juice
- 7-up or ginger ale
- Decaf tea

## LIQUID FOODS

*(To help with loss of appetite)*

- Pureed soups
- Milk (all types)
- Milkshakes
- Smoothies
- Tomato juice
- Yogurt
- Instant breakfast drinks
- Liquid meal replacements

## FOODS AND DRINKS THAT ARE HIGH IN CALORIES OR PROTEIN

*(To help with loss of appetite)*

- Cream soups
- Soups with lentils or beans
- Beef
- Cheese
- Chicken
- Cottage cheese
- Eggs
- Fish
- Peanut butter

## SWEETS

- Applesauce
- Jell-O
- Popsicles
- Sherbet or ice cream
- Yogurt

## HIGH-FIBER FOODS

*(To help with constipation)*

- Bran muffins
- Whole-grain cereals
- Brown rice
- Peas and beans
- Whole-wheat bread
- Whole-wheat pasta
- Dried fruit
- Fresh fruits and vegetables

## LOW-FIBER FOODS

*(To help with diarrhea)*

- Cottage cheese
- Eggs
- Fish
- Potatoes
- White rice
- Bananas
- Yogurt
- Jell-O

## FOODS FOR A SORE MOUTH

- Oatmeal or grits
- Cottage cheese
- Scrambled eggs
- Macaroni and cheese
- Mashed potatoes
- Soups
- Milkshakes
- Puddings
- Smoothies
- Yogurt







*A Client Care Module:*  
**Caring for Clients During Chemo**

EMPLOYEE NAME  
 (Please print):

\_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

- ***I understand the information presented in this inservice.***
- ***I have completed this inservice and answered at least eight of the test questions correctly.***

EMPLOYEE SIGNATURE:

\_\_\_\_\_

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Inservice Credit:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Self Study	1 hour
<input type="checkbox"/> Group Study	1 hour

***File completed test in employee's personnel file.***

***Are you "In the Know" about caring for clients during chemo? Circle the best choice or fill in your answer. Then check your answers with your supervisor!***

- 1. Cancer is a disease in which cells grow, divide and invade other tissues:**
  - A. Quickly.
  - B. In an organized way.
  - C. Over a long period of time.
  - D. None of these.
- 2. Depending on the type of cancer and how advanced it is, chemo can:**
  - A. Cure cancer.
  - B. Ease the symptoms of cancer.
  - C. Control the growth and spread of cancer.
  - D. All of these.
- 3. Your client has been diagnosed with anemia related to her chemo. Which of the following is an example of an iron-rich meal you might serve?**
  - A. Clear soup, ginger ale and Jell-O.
  - B. Spaghetti in Alfredo sauce with a roll.
  - C. Scrambled eggs, whole grain toast and yogurt with blueberries.
  - D. Hot dog on a bun, macaroni & cheese, a chocolate chip cookie and iced tea.
- 4. Your client has an order for "no fresh flowers." You know this means he is suffering from:**
  - A. Neutropenia.
  - B. Anemia.
  - C. Allergies.
  - D. Nausea and vomiting.
- 5. True or False**  
 Clients with catheters and ports must be monitored for signs of infection.
- 6. True or False**  
 Mouth care during chemo should include a firm toothbrush and mouthwash that contains alcohol.
- 7. True or False**  
 The symptoms of "chemo brain" are usually only temporary.
- 8. True or False**  
 Good food choices for someone suffering from diarrhea include cream soups and bran muffins.
- 9. True or False**  
 It's important for clients to eat three large meals a day while on chemo.
- 10. True or False**  
 Light exercise can help with fatigue and improve appetite.

