

# **5FU**

**(ALSO CALLED 5 FLUOROURACIL)**

**What it Does:** This chemotherapy drug interferes with cancer cell growth by damaging the building blocks of the cell (DNA or RNA) so that the cancer cells cannot continue to grow and multiply. Chemotherapy affects normal cells in the body as well as cancer cells. This is why certain side effects occur. Normal cells repair themselves faster than cancer cells; therefore, most of the side effects diminish over time when the drug is not being administered.

**How it is Given:** 5FU is given intravenously (by injection into a vein in the arm or port-a-cath).

## **Possible Side Effects and What to do About Them:**

### **Nausea and Vomiting:**

- Take prescribed medication as needed for any nausea and vomiting that may occur
- When nauseated, sip on small amounts at a time of clear liquids such as ginger-ale, broth, or eat Jello, Popsicles, etc. Dry crackers, toast, and popcorn may also help reduce nausea
- Avoid fatty, highly salted, or spicy food.

**Low Blood Counts:** 5FU may cause bone marrow depression (your blood counts to drop). Your physician will notify you if your blood counts are low.

Call your physician/nurse if you develop:

- Fever of 101 degrees or higher and/or chills
- Any nose or gum bleeding
- Blood in your stool or urine
- Excessive bruising
- Cough or sore throat

**Photosensitivity:** You may sunburn very easily while taking this medication.

- While being outdoors, use sunblock lotions to exposed skin
- Wear protective clothing when you are out in the sun

### **Diarrhea:**

- Report diarrhea (three or four loose stools in a 24 hour period) to your physician or nurse
- Take anti-diarrhea medication as prescribed by your doctor/nurse
- Avoid foods high in roughage and fibers such as raw fruits and vegetables
- Drink one to two liters of fluid per day

**Sore Mouth:** If you develop any sore or ulcers in your mouth, notify your physician or nurse for a prescription mouthwash. Do not use a commercial mouthwash – most of them contain alcohol, which may cause further irritation.

- Keep your mouth clean; use a soft bristle toothbrush and rinse your mouth after meals and at bedtime with salt water (1 tsp. of salt in 1 qt. of water) or 1 tsp. of baking soda in 8 oz. water
- If you wear dentures, remove them if your gums are sore and irritated
- Keep lips moistened with Vaseline
- Avoid hot, spicy foods as well as acidic foods and juices - cool foods seem to be more soothing
- Avoid use of alcohol and tobacco