

that was certainly something that he wanted to do . . . My particular cancer had spread through my lymph nodes—at least one of them was positive, so I didn't have a choice, I had to have the chemotherapy.

[the doctor took out 3] lymph nodes and . . . one of them was positive [had cancer cells]. So that meant I had to have, (they gave me a choice), either . . . the . . . breast removed and have chemotherapy or have radiation and chemotherapy.

Ruth Demit [Athabaskan]



CHEMOTHERAPY

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy has been used for fifty years, but many changes have occurred in the types of drugs used, dosage, and frequency. Chemotherapy is sometimes recommended prior to surgery to shrink the tumor and make it more feasible for the surgeon to remove all of it. Chemotherapy affects the DNA of the cells by interfering with cell duplication. Chemotherapy affects both cancerous and healthy cell DNA. The healthy cells that are particularly susceptible to chemotherapeutic drugs are those which multiple quickly, like the skin (including hair), gastrointestinal tract, and bone marrow. Chemotherapy on healthy cell DNA results in side effects such as temporary hair loss (due to the effect on the DNA of the hair follicle), fever blisters or diarrhea (due to the effect on the DNA of the gastrointestinal tract). Although there are common effects of specific chemo regimens, every cancer patient responds differently and the chemotherapy is modified for the patient.