

Coping With the Side Effects of Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy destroys cancer cells but can also affect normal, healthy cells. Since chemotherapy travels throughout the body, damage to healthy cells may cause side effects. Common side effects of chemotherapy may include the following:

- Nausea and vomiting



- Sensitivity to cold



- Diarrhea



- Fatigue/anemia (insufficient red blood cells)



- Dry skin



- Increased chance of infection

- Mouth sores



- Bruising



- Hair loss



- Neuropathy (tingling or numbness in fingers or toes)



Side effects and the degree to which they are experienced vary from person to person. Many side effects disappear once the treatment has stopped. Ask your health-care team if there are medications available to manage or prevent side effects.

Helpful Tips for Managing Side Effects

These tips are suggestions only. As always, follow the advice of your health-care provider.

Important: If you have another condition, follow those guidelines as well.

Anemia and Fatigue

Tip	Example
Get plenty of rest	Take naps during the day
Light exercise may help	Stay active, take short walks
Eat a well-balanced diet	Ask to speak with a nutritionist
Restrict unnecessary activities, save your energy	Do only the things that are important and let others help
Ask your doctor about treatment for fatigue	Treatment is available to help your body produce more red blood cells and thus help fight fatigue

Mouth Sores

Tip	Example
Avoid over-the-counter mouthwashes that contain alcohol	Rinse often with warm salt water or ask about a fluoride rinse
Brush your teeth and gums after every meal	Choose an extra soft toothbrush and a gentle touch
Avoid rough, irritating, or acidic foods	Tomatoes, citrus fruits, spicy foods, or raw vegetables
Stop smoking and using all tobacco products	You can chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless hard candy
Eat soft, soothing foods	Cooked cereals, scrambled eggs, and puddings are examples of soft, soothing foods

Coping With the Side Effects of Chemotherapy (cont'd)

Nausea and Vomiting

Tip	Example
Avoid large meals	Eat small meals throughout the day
Avoid lying down for 2 hours after a meal	Sit in a chair after meals
Avoid alcoholic beverages and caffeine	Drink cool, clear, unsweetened fruit juices
Avoid strong food odors	Eat foods cold or at room temperature
Avoid fried, fatty, or spicy foods	Examples are hamburgers, french fries, or spicy foods such as chili peppers or curry

Diarrhea

Tip	Example
Drink plenty of fluids to replenish your body	Drink water, consommé, and other clear liquids; try to avoid caffeine and alcohol
Avoid milk and milk products in your diet to reduce gas, bloating, and diarrhea	Examples of milk-based products are ice cream and cheese
Avoid very hot or cold liquids	Drink liquids at room temperature
Eat foods that contain sodium and potassium	Include bananas, mashed potatoes, and canned or peeled fruits in your diet
Avoid high-fiber foods	Raw vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grain breads, and fruit with skin are some examples of high-fiber foods

- If you experience diarrhea, try the **BRAT** diet — bananas, rice (white), applesauce, and toast (not whole grain)
- Contact your doctor if diarrhea continues for more than 24 hours
- Do not take over-the-counter medications without first asking your doctor



Neuropathy and Sensitivity to Cold

A side effect of some chemotherapy drugs is neuropathy. Neuropathy is a numbness or tingling in the hands or feet. Exposure to cold may cause this side effect to become more severe. It is very important to take the following precautions:

- Avoid cold food such as ice cream, cold drinks, or adding ice cubes in any drinks
- Make sure all foods and drinks are at room temperature or warmer
- Avoid activities that require you to go outside in cold weather
- If you have to go out in the cold, cover your nose and mouth, and wear a hat, gloves, and scarf
- Avoid washing your hands in cold water
- Avoid close contact with air conditioners or freezers

