

Common Side Effects While Receiving Chemotherapy or Immunotherapy



Side effects often times occur when you are receiving treatment. Listed are some common side effects and steps you can take to feel better. **Tell your medical oncology care team of any side effects you may be experiencing.**

Cancer Related Brain Fog

- Keep a journal or calendar of your events & activities and write yourself reminder notes.
- Get at least 8 hours of sleep a night.
- Rest, sleep and exercise. Move enough to get your heart rate up, take a walk around the block- try to get at least 20-30 minutes of physical activity each day.
- Ask your provider about scheduling an appointment with Occupational Therapy
- You may find it helpful to attend a class on “chemo-fog.” Go to atimetohealfoundation.org for class dates and times.

Constipation

- Drink at least 64 ounces of non-caffeinated beverages a day and increase fiber. High fiber foods include: bran, broccoli, cabbage, berries (raspberries), leafy greens, celery, squash, beans, mushrooms, and oranges.
- If you normally have a bowel movement every day and miss, start taking an over the counter stool softener such as Colace™. If you are taking prescription pain medicine, take a stool softener, don't wait until you can't have a bowel movement.
- If no bowel movement for two days, start taking over the counter Miralax™ per the directions on the bottle. If this doesn't work after 2-3 doses, call us, you may need something stronger. A stool softener is not needed when taking Miralax™. Miralax™ is a combined stool softener and stimulant.

Diarrhea

- No foods that are greasy, spicy, or fried. Milk, dairy products and high fiber foods such as vegetables can make diarrhea worse. The BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast) can help slow down diarrhea.
- Drink plenty of fluids. At least 64 ounces of non-caffeinated beverages a day.
- Imodium can be purchased over the counter. Follow the directions on the box, if not effective after 2 days, or if you have more than 8 liquid stools in 24 hours, call us.

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Dehydration

- Drink fluids. Sip on something all day. Keep drinks close to you if getting up tires you.
- Remember that food contains fluid. Try to eat fruits, vegetables, soups, gelatins, Popsicles, and other moist foods.
- Try to get rid of the cause of dehydration (vomiting, diarrhea, fever)
- Call us if you can't take in or hold down liquids, have vomiting, diarrhea, or fever that last more than 24 hours, your urine is dark, or if you are dizzy, faint or become confused or disoriented. These can be signs of serious dehydration requiring IV hydration.

Fatigue

- Rest, sleep and exercise. Get up and move enough to get your heart rate up, take a walk around the block- try to get at least 20-30 minutes of physical activity each day.
- Good nutrition and adequate fluid intake help with fatigue as well. Eating a balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables and proteins will give your body the energy it needs.

Fever

- Almost all patients will have fever at some time, especially if the cancer or its treatment affects the immune system.
- It is extremely important that you notify your physician immediately if you develop a fever of 100.4 or higher, have shaking chills or have signs of an infection.

Mouth discomfort

- Rinse your mouth 3-4 times per day with a baking soda and saltwater solution. Dissolve 1 tsp each of baking soda and salt in 4-6 ounces of water. Gargle/rinse for 30 seconds then spit out.
- Try using Biotene™; an alcohol-free mouth wash and spray.
- Avoid toothpaste and mouthwash that contain alcohol, such as Listerine™. If you do get sores in your mouth and you aren't able to eat or drink well, call us.

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Nausea and vomiting

- Take medications for nausea and vomiting as prescribed. If the medication we have given you isn't working, call us. There are other medications that work differently to prevent nausea and vomiting.
- Eat small frequent meals and stick to bland foods. Do not eat fried or spicy foods.
- Eat foods that are room temperature or cold, as smells can trigger nausea. Have someone else prepare meals if possible.
- Good oral care can help – keep your mouth clean and brush at least twice a day.

Skin and nail changes

- Keep your body hydrated by drinking 64 ounces of non-caffeinated beverages a day. Use non-scented lotions to keep your skin moist; these are both very important to help prevent the skin changes. Using water-based moisturizers, lotions or ointments such as Vaseline™, Cetaphil™ or Eucerin™ that don't contain perfumes or dyes are best.
- Shower or bathe using warm water, and avoid using hot water.
- Antihistamines (Benadryl™ or Claritin™) and topical cortisone cream (over the counter) may help relieve itchy skin.
- Keeping your nails clean, moisturized and protected can help prevent some of the nail changes you may experience. Avoid harsh chemicals and frequent water immersion.

Other tips

- Bring a list of your medications to every visit to our office.
- Do not start any new medications or supplements without first speaking with your provider.
- For your convenience, contact your pharmacy for all medication refills.
- Notify your provider if you are going to have any dental work done, we may want to check your blood counts first.
- Wash your hands often, use warm water with a good lather for 20 seconds
- Avoid sun exposure, wear SPF of 30 or higher and clothing that covers exposed areas

You may find it helpful to journal your experience, websites like CaringBridge (caringbridge.org) and LIVESTRONG (livestrong.org) are also great resources.