

Caring for Yourself After Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy may have side effects. Everyone reacts differently to chemotherapy.

The following information will help you care for yourself after having chemotherapy.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is important to help you feel better and stronger.

- Eat smaller meals more often. Do not overeat.
- Eat foods that are higher in calories and protein to increase your energy and help your body heal.
- Drink six to eight 8-ounce glasses of liquids each day.

Some side effects can make it harder to eat well and drink enough liquids. Here are some tips to manage these side effects.

- **If water does not taste good**, try adding flavor enhancers or well-cleaned fruit, mint, herbs or cucumber to your water.
- **If your food tastes different**, try marinating meat or fish, or adding herbs to brighten the flavor of foods.
- **If you have a sensitivity to smells**, try avoiding foods with a strong odor or turning on your stove vent to help eliminate odors from cooking indoors.
- **If you have a saline or metallic taste**, practice good oral care and you can also try sucking on hard candy.

When to Call the Clinic

Call the clinic if you have:

- chills or a temperature of 100.5 F or higher
- shortness of breath
- loose stools (more than 3 in 24 hours)
- no bowel movement for 48 hours
- any questions or concerns about your side effects.

You should also call the clinic if you have taken your anti-nausea medicine but are unable to keep food or liquids down, or you are unable to eat or drink.

Clinic phone number: _____

- **If you have a decreased appetite**, try eating 5 to 6 small meals each day or drinking liquid or powder meal replacements that add calories such as Boost® or Ensure®.
- **If you have trouble swallowing or a sore throat**, try eating soft foods such as milk shakes, scrambled eggs, smoothies, milk-soaked cold cereal, or warm cereal (Cream of Rice®, Cream of Wheat®, Malt-O-Meal®), or eating cool or room temperature foods.

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Nausea and Vomiting

Chemotherapy may cause nausea (upset stomach) and vomiting (throwing up) because it affects the stomach lining and the part of the brain that controls vomiting. The amount of nausea and vomiting a person has varies from person to person.

Nausea and vomiting can usually be controlled with medicine. You can also help manage nausea and vomiting by:

- eating smaller meals more often
- eating bland foods and liquids such as crackers, toast, white rice or yogurt
- drinking more liquids: — clear liquids such as water, ginger ale, fruit juices — try Popsicles®, Jell-O®, ice chips and sport drinks
- avoiding fried, fatty, greasy or spicy foods.

Mouth Sores

Chemotherapy could cause your mouth to become dry or develop sores. To help prevent mouth sores, you should:

- Try a baking soda, saltwater rinse (¼ teaspoon baking soda, ⅛ teaspoon salt, 1 cup warm water). Rinse 3 to 4 times each day and then rinse mouth with plain water after using the rinse.
- Use a soft bristle toothbrush or oral sponge swabs.
- Avoid using floss and toothpicks if your blood counts are low.
- Avoid rinsing with alcohol-containing products.
- Drink lots of liquids and drink through a straw.
- Eat soft foods. Avoid foods with rough or dry textures.
- Keep your lips and mouth moist.
- Avoid tobacco and alcohol.

Biotène® is a mouthwash that will help with symptoms of dry mouth.

Constipation

If you have trouble passing stools or have fewer than three bowel movements a week, you have constipation. To help manage constipation:

- Drink plenty of liquids (about 8 to 10 large glasses each day). Try including some prune, pear or apple juice.
- Eat high-fiber foods such as nuts and seeds, whole-grain breads, popcorn, fresh and dried fruits, beans, and raw or cooked vegetables.

Take an over-the-counter laxative and stool softener such as MiraLAX® and Colace® (docusate sodium). Follow package instructions.

Diarrhea

Chemotherapy may cause diarrhea. Signs of diarrhea include an increased frequency of bowel movements and loose, watery bowel movements. To help manage diarrhea:

- Eat small meals more often. Stay hydrated.
- Eat low fiber foods such as plain yogurt, white rice or white toast.
- Limit high-fat and high-sugar foods.
- Try the BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce, toast).

Fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of tiredness that can keep you from doing the things you normally do or want to do. It is one of the most common problems people deal with when going through cancer treatment. Here are some ways to help manage fatigue:

- Plan your day so that you have time to rest.
- Take several short naps instead of one, long rest period.
- Pace your activities around your energy level.
- Take short walks or do light exercise once a day if you can.

- Try easier or shorter versions of activities you enjoy.
- Try less strenuous activities, like reading or visiting with friends and family.
- Save your energy for those activities that are most important to you.
- Do activities that you enjoy or make you feel good.
- Eat a well-balanced diet if possible and drink plenty of liquids.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol.

Skin Changes

Chemotherapy can cause a rash, acne-like blemishes, dryness, peeling and itching. It is important to take good care of your skin.

- Use mild, unscented soap.
- Use warm water instead of hot water. Pat your skin gently to dry it. Do not rub your skin.
- Use a moisturizer every day.
- Your skin may be very sensitive to the sun. Wear protective clothing and sunscreen with an SPF 15 or higher.

Preventing Infection

Chemotherapy can increase your risk of getting an infection. Here are some ways to help prevent getting an infection:

- Hand washing is the most important way to prevent spreading an infection. Wash your hands often with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds. You should wash your hands:
 - before preparing or eating food
 - before touching your eyes, nose or mouth
 - after using the restroom
 - after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
 - after touching clinic surfaces such as an exam table, desk, doorknob or chair.
- Avoid visiting family and friends who are sick
- Do not clean the cat's litter box or handle any animal waste.
- Be sure to wash all fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Do not eat raw seafood or meat cooked rare.