



Treatment Side Effects

Treatment will help you get better, but it also has some side effects. There are some things you can do to help you through these.

Dealing with the side effects of treatment can be hard. Here are the most common problems and ways to help you through it.

What can I do about feeling sick to my stomach and throwing up?

Nausea is that sick feeling in your stomach that often goes along with throwing up. After starting your chemotherapy, you might feel sick almost right away or a few hours afterwards. Most people will feel better within a day or 2 after finishing a round of chemotherapy.

To avoid nausea and throwing up (or just to make it a little better), try some of these things:

- Eat small meals more often during the day
- Eat dry crackers or toast
- Drinking liquids like fruit juice, ginger ale or colas
- Suck on a popsicle
- Avoid spicy or rich food
- Avoid fatty, fried, greasy foods
- Avoid red meat
- Stay away from foods with a strong smell
- Think about saving your favorite foods until you are done with treatment or over the worst nausea

If you feel sick, tell someone on your healthcare team, because there are medicines you can take that might help. If you feel like throwing up, it is best to keep your puke bucket (also called an “emesis basin”) nearby.

If you cannot eat or drink, you need to call your doctor or nurse practitioner. This is really important, because you could end up in the hospital.

For younger teens

For more information about nausea and throwing up, see “[Plumbing Problems: Nausea and Vomiting](#)” on the Teens with Cancer Web site. On teenslivingwithcancer.org, follow links to “Dealing With It” > “Body Issues” > “Plumbing Problems: Nausea and Vomiting.”

For older teens and young adults

For more information, see “[Managing Eating Problems During Treatment](#)” on the National Cancer Institute Web site. From www.cancer.gov, follow links to “Cancer Topics” > “Coping With Cancer” > “Nutritional Concerns: Eating Hints for Cancer Patients: Before, During and After Treatment” > “Managing Eating Problems During Treatment.”

“I knew that I had this weird stuff inside my body and it affected the way I felt about everything....I felt like I was in a fog.”
-Post from Planet Cancer discussion board

“I’ve got constipation problems all the time. Gosh, it’s annoying, but I take joy when I have a normal poop or shall we say, medically speaking, ‘bowel movement!’”

-Post from Teens Living with Cancer discussion board

What can I do about constipation and diarrhea?

Most people do not like to talk about these things. Your healthcare team will try to use the “polite” term: bowel movement. But no matter how you say it, a lot of people think that talking about poop is embarrassing. But both constipation and diarrhea are very common side effects of chemotherapy treatment.

There are some things that can help. And if it seems embarrassing to talk about, remember that lots of other people who get treatment for cancer have the same problems.

Constipation

Lots of things about treatment can make you constipated. If you do not have a bowel movement in 3 days, have bad stomach pain, or have pain when you have a bowel movement, please tell your healthcare team. There are medicines that can help!

Here are some things you can do to help:

- Drink lots of water or any kind of liquids
- If you feel well enough, get some exercise. Walking can really help!

It is very important never to use suppositories or enemas for constipation.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea is often caused by the medicines you are taking. But it can also be a sign of an infection. So it is important to tell your healthcare team about it right away when it happens. It is important that you avoid over-the-counter (non-prescription) medicines to stop diarrhea.

When you have diarrhea:

- Tell your healthcare team right away
- Drink lots of water or liquids
- Eat small amounts of food at a time
- Avoid greasy foods
- Avoid milk and dairy products

It is important to call your doctor or nurse practitioner if:

- You have diarrhea more than 4 times in 8 hours
- You do not pee for 6 to 8 hours
- You can’t eat or drink

For younger teens

See “[Plumbing Problems: Diarrhea and Constipation](#)” on the Teens with Cancer Web site. On teenslivingwithcancer.org, follow links to “Dealing With It” > “Body Issues” > ”Plumbing Problems: Diarrhea and Constipation.”

For older teens and young adults

See “[Managing Eating Problems During Treatment](#)” on the National Cancer Institute Web site. From www.cancer.gov, follow links to “Cancer Topics” > “Coping With Cancer” > “Nutritional Concerns: Eating Hints for Cancer Patients: Before, During and After Treatment” > “Managing Eating Problems During Treatment.”

I feel too hot and then too cold. What is happening to my body?

Chemo can do strange things to your body temperature. You might get rigors (say RYE-gurs), or start shaking because you feel so cold. You might also feel too hot right after feeling chills. Just do your best to respond to what your body is telling you. Get blankets and a heating pad when you feel cold, and switch them out fast for an icepack when you feel hot. And always be sure to check your temperature.

For younger teens

See “[Temperature Control](#)” on the Teens with Cancer Web site. On teenslivingwithcancer.org, follow links to “Dealing With It” > “Body Issues” > “Temperature Control.”

For older teens and young adults

See “[Fever, Sweats and Hot Flashes](#)” on the National Cancer Institute Web site. From www.cancer.gov, follow links to “Cancer Topics” > “Coping With Cancer” > “Other Complications/Side Effects: Fever, Sweats and Hot Flashes.”

Why does my mouth hurt?

Chemotherapy and radiation can cause mouth sores. These are painful, inflamed, irritated areas in you mouth and throat. Mouth sores are also called “mucositis.” They can last for a month or two, so try to be patient.

It is best to visit the dentist before you start treatment. Always tell your doctor or nurse practitioner before you go to see the dentist.

You cannot always avoid getting mouth sores, but there are some ways to keep them from getting worse, if you do get them. Be easy on your mouth—use a soft-bristled toothbrush, and stay away from foods that hurt to eat.

Sometimes, mouth sores can get really bad. If you are not able to eat or drink because your mouth hurts, it is really important that you let your healthcare team know right away.

For younger teens

See “[Plumbing Problems: Mouth Sores](#)” on the Teens with Cancer Web site. On teenslivingwithcancer.org, follow links to “I Can Deal With It” > “Body Issues” > “Plumbing Problems: Mouth Sores.”

“Going to the gym and walking followed by a long stretching session has made me feel better... but I still get so sore that I feel like I’m 80 some days.”
-Post from Planet Cancer discussion board

To Learn More

- Hematology/Oncology
206-987-2106
- Ask your healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers
- 206-987-2280 (TTY)

For older teens and young adults

See [“Management of Oral Complications During and After Chemotherapy and/or Radiation Therapy”](#) on the National Cancer Institute Web site. From www.cancer.gov, follow links to “Cancer Topics”> “Coping With Cancer”> “Other Complications/Side Effects: Oral Complications of Chemotherapy and Head/Neck Radiation.”

What can I do about pain?

Having pain is one of the very hard parts of having cancer and getting treatment. There are different causes of pain, and everybody deals with pain differently. Your healthcare team wants to make you as comfortable and pain-free as possible. They can help you find the right medicines to help. But remember, it is very important to check with your healthcare team before taking any medicine – even aspirin or Tylenol!

Things you can do to cope with pain

- Watch TV or your favorite movie
- Play video games
- Listen to music or a book on CD
- Have someone tell you a story
- Exercise
- Get a massage
- Get acupressure or acupuncture
- Try Reiki therapy

Always let someone know when you are having pain. Some of the most effective medicines to treat pain are narcotics. You do not need to worry about becoming addicted when taking them for pain.