

# **Chemotherapy.** *Managing side effects.*

In addition to cancer cells, other cells in your body grow and divide rapidly. These include cells that produce hair, blood and the lining of your mouth, stomach and intestines. Most normal cells recover quickly when chemotherapy is over, and most side effects should gradually disappear. Specific symptoms you may experience are:

- Fatigue
- Feeling weak, loss of strength
- Nausea and vomiting
- Hair loss
- Drop in white blood cells, increasing chance of infection
- Drop in red blood cells, increasing chance of anemia
- Skin and nail changes
- Peripheral neuropathy (tingling, burning, weakness or numbness in your hands/feet)

## ***Coping with nausea***

Nausea and vomiting can usually be decreased with the use of anti-nausea medication. You will most likely be given medicine in your IV prior to starting the chemotherapy treatment. In addition, you will be given a prescription for anti-nausea medication to take at home. If the medicine is not working, let your doctor know so that you may switch to a drug that may work better. In addition to the medication, here are some other recommendations:

- Avoid large meals. Try eating small meals throughout the day instead of the customary three meals per day.
- Drink liquids at least an hour before or after meals instead of during mealtime.
- Eat and drink slowly and chew your food well for easier digestion.
- Drink cool, clear, unsweetened fruit juices, such as apple or grape juice, or light-colored sodas such as ginger ale that have lost their fizz and do not have caffeine.
- Avoid sweet, fried or fatty foods.
- Avoid eating for at least a few hours before treatment if nausea usually occurs during therapy.

### *Coping with fatigue*

Fatigue or feeling tired is the most common symptom reported by cancer patients. There may be several reasons for this. It can be due to your disease, surgery, radiation, low blood counts, lack of sleep, pain, stress or poor appetite, and other factors. Rest does not always relieve it, so it is important to try and make your life simpler during this time. Fatigue can last days, weeks or months, but it does gradually improve as the tumor responds to treatment.

#### **The following are some recommendations for coping with fatigue:**

- Plan your day so that you have time for rest/naps. Sometimes several short naps or breaks are more helpful than one long rest period.
- Save your energy for the most important things.
- Take short walks or do light exercise such as yoga, if possible.
- Join a support group. Sharing your feelings with others can ease the burden of fatigue, plus you can learn how others deal with their fatigue.
- Allow others to do some things for you that you usually do.
- Report any changes in energy level to your doctor or nurse.

### *Infection*

White blood cells (WBCs) help the body to fight off infections. Chemotherapy sometimes affects the bone marrow, causing a low production of WBCs. Therefore, it is important to try to avoid infections as much as possible.

#### **The following are some recommendations:**

- Wash your hands often during the day, especially before you eat, after you use the bathroom, and after touching animals.
- Try to avoid people who are sick with contagious illnesses, such as a cold, the flu, measles or chicken pox. Also try to avoid crowds by going shopping or to the movies when stores or theaters are least likely to be busy.
- Stay away from children who recently have received a “live virus” vaccine such as chicken pox or polio, since they may be contagious to people with a low WBC count.
- Do not tear the cuticles of your nails.
- Be careful not to cut or nick yourself with scissors, needles or knives.
- Use an electric razor to prevent breaks or cuts in the skin.
- Clean cuts or scrapes right away, and daily, with warm soap and water and an antiseptic until healed.

- Use a soft toothbrush that won't hurt your gums and be careful when using dental floss. Woven or waxed dental floss is recommended.
- Do not get any immunizations without first checking with your doctor.

**If you do get an infection, it is important to let your doctor know right away. The following are some symptoms of infection:**

- Fever over 100° F or 38° C
- Chills, especially shaking chills
- Sweating
- Loose bowel movements greater than four episodes in a 24-hour period. This can also be a side effect of chemotherapy.
- Frequent urgency to urinate or a burning feeling when you do so
- Severe cough or sore throat
- Redness, swelling or tenderness, especially around a wound, sore, pimple, the rectal area or the catheter site
- Sinus pain or pressure
- Earaches, headaches or stiff neck
- Blisters on lips or skin
- Mouth sores

### ***Dealing with hair loss***

Hair loss may occur when taking chemotherapy drugs. This may involve the thinning of hair or hair falling out completely. Hair loss may also occur with facial hair, arm and leg hair, underarm and pubic hair. You may start to see hair loss within days to weeks following your first treatment. Hair may fall out gradually or in clumps. Your scalp may become tender prior to or during actual hair loss. Hair that remains growing may appear dull and dry. If you do lose hair during your treatments, there are many options available to enhance your appearance.

### **These items are available at our Appearance Center:**

- Turbans
- Hats
- Scarves
- Wigs and hair pieces

Before starting treatment, it is recommended that you purchase a wig. This allows you to choose a wig that most closely matches your own hair. For a personal consultation, make an appointment to meet with our licensed cosmetologist. Call (626) 535-2424 to schedule an appointment.

### **Recommendations**

- Use mild shampoo.
- Use a soft hairbrush.
- Use low heat when drying your hair.
- Don't use brush rollers to set your hair.
- Don't dye your hair or get a permanent.
- Have your hair cut short (a shorter style will make your hair look thicker and fuller and make hair loss a little easier to manage).

### **Good nutrition**

- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Don't take any medications without first checking with your doctor or nurse.
- Check with your doctor or nurse before drinking alcoholic beverages.
- Limit caffeine.
- Limit junk food.
- Let your doctor know if you take herbal supplements.

### ***Helping with kidney and bladder function***

Some drugs used during your treatment may irritate the bladder or cause some temporary or permanent damage to the kidneys. They may also cause your urine to change color (orange, red or yellow) or give your urine a strong odor.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle; it is recommended that you drink plenty of fluids every day. We recommend you drink approximately three liters of fluid a day during the time you are undergoing chemotherapy treatment.

**3 liters = 3 quarts = 12 servings of 8 fluid ounces each**

These are approximate measurements. Please check with your doctor or the oncology nurse to make sure that you do not have any health problems that would prevent you from drinking the recommended amount of fluids.

### ***Other possible side effects***

#### **Peripheral neuropathy**

Some drugs may cause you to feel a tingling, burning, weakness or numbness in your hands and/or feet. This is known as peripheral neuropathy. If you experience these feelings, please notify your doctor or oncology nurse.

#### **Skin problems**

Some drugs may also cause a darkening of the skin along the intravenous (IV) site, redness, itching, peeling, dryness, acne or nail darkening. Remember, chemotherapy treatment may make you more sensitive to sunlight, so protect your skin by avoiding the sun or covering up when in it.