

Michiana Hematology Oncology, PC

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Common Side Effects of Chemotherapy

1. **Alopecia - Hair loss** -- Some types of chemotherapy can cause your hair to come out. This may occur 1 - 3 weeks after a treatment or up to 3 - 4 months after a treatment, depending on the drugs you receive. Your hair should start growing back about 4 - 6 weeks after you complete your chemotherapy treatments. Anyone receiving chemotherapy should not perm or dye their hair, as the hair often becomes more brittle and dry while a person is taking chemotherapy. Use a mild shampoo and try to decrease the use of hair dryers, hot rollers and curling irons. Keep your head covered in the winter to minimize heat loss, and protected from sunlight in warm weather to prevent sunburn.
2. **Stomatitis - Mouth sores** -- Some chemotherapy drugs can cause the development of mouth sores over the inside of the mouth, tongue, throat or gums. Once sores develop they take about a week to heal. The best way to prevent or minimize mouth sores is to take good care of the inside of your mouth. **Brush three times a day with a soft bristle toothbrush. After brushing, rinse with a mixture of ½ cup warm water and 2 teaspoons of baking soda.** This should be done after every meal or snack. Also, if you wear dentures or have a partial plate, remove it after eating to prevent any food particles from irritating your gums. **If you notice sore areas, pink or red areas, white patches or blisters in your mouth, call the nurses at once.** Drinking 2 quarts of fluids a day or more will also help to keep your mouth moist. Avoid mouth care products which contain alcohol.
3. **Anorexia - Loss of appetite** -- It is very important to eat a healthy diet high in calories and protein. This gives you energy and helps you to remain active during treatment. Chemotherapy can change the way some food tastes to you and may change your appetite. If you find that you cannot eat three large meals a day, try and eat less food more often (5 - 6 times a day). We have additional information on eating, and a dietician available for consultations if needed. Should you find that you are not eating well, try a diet supplement, such as Carnation Instant Breakfast, Ensure, Sustacal, Boost or a high protein drink. We would really like to see you maintain your ideal body weight throughout your treatments. If weight loss becomes a concern due to poor appetite, there may be a medication that your physician could prescribe as long as it did not interfere with your chemotherapy and disease.
4. **Nausea and Vomiting** -- Take your anti-nausea medicine as directed, and stick to clear liquids when your stomach is upset. Drinking Gatorade will help to replace fluids and electrolytes. Please let the nurses and your doctor know how you feel following your treatments. **If the nausea medicine we give you does not work, please let us know so we can try something else for you. If you are unable to keep anything down for 12 - 24 hours it is very important that you call the office and/ or the nurse on call.**

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5. **Diarrhea** -- A few of the chemotherapy drugs can cause your stools to be loose or for you to have diarrhea. Imodium A-D can be purchased over the counter and can be used for the treatment of diarrhea. *See the diarrhea instruction sheet in your teaching folder.* **If you continue to have diarrhea for more than 72 hours and/or you are feeling unusually weak and dehydrated please call the nurses.**

6. **Constipation** -- You may use an over the counter medicine that has worked for you in the past, such as Pericolace, Colace, Doxidan, Fibercon, Senokot. *See the laxative protocol in your teaching folder.* **If after using a laxative you still are constipated please call the nurses.**

7. **Fever - Infection** -- Chemotherapy will probably lower your body's ability to fight an infection if your white blood count is lowered temporarily. **If you have a fever of 101 degrees or more, or have chills, you need to call your doctor without delay. If you are unable to reach your doctor and/or the nurse on call, you need to go to the Emergency Room as soon as possible. This is very important and needs to be followed regardless of what time of day or night it is.**

8. **Bleeding** -- Chemotherapy may also cause your platelet count to drop below normal temporarily. This may cause you to bleed easier. **Report any unusual bleeding or bruising to your doctor at once, such as blood in your urine or stool, bleeding gums, or nosebleeds. Do not take any aspirin or products that contain aspirin. Aspirin may cause increased bleeding.**

9. **Anemia** -- Chemotherapy may also cause your red blood count (hemoglobin) to drop below normal temporarily. You may feel tired after your treatments, or tire more easily than usual. This is normal. You need to listen to your body and rest when you feel tired. **If you find you are getting extremely tired and experiencing shortness of breath with normal activities please call the nurses and let them know.**

10. **Numbness - Tingling** -- A few chemotherapy drugs may cause numbness and/or tingling in your hands and feet. This numbness is sometimes temporary and in most cases dosage related. **If you experience numbness, tingling or pain in your hands and feet please contact the nurses.**

11. **Bone Pain - Body Aches** -- A few chemotherapy medications can cause general body achiness and bone pain. In most cases this discomfort can be controlled with Tylenol or Ibuprofen. **If you experience uncontrolled bone pain please contact the nurses for assistance.**

If you or your family has any questions or concerns, please call the Chemotherapy Clinic.

An Answering service is available after hours and on weekends and will route your call to the physicians and/or nurses as needed.