

Michiana Hematology Oncology, PC

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Treatment and Tools Helpful Hints for Dealing with Side Effects of Chemotherapy

Introduction

If you are about to receive chemotherapy treatments or you are already receiving them, you are probably concerned about possible side effects.

It is important for you to know that everyone reacts differently to chemotherapy. Many people do not experience side effects or experience only mild effects.

You should also know that different types of chemotherapy may cause different side effects, and that no one experiences all of the side effects listed.

Not all side effects occur the day of chemotherapy. They can occur days to weeks later, if at all.

If you do feel any discomfort or side effects while you are receiving chemotherapy, we have listed a number of ways that we have found helpful in relieving or eliminating them.

Fatigue

- Take naps as needed.
- Pace activities to avoid over-exertion
- Exercise as tolerated. Mild exercise can boost your energy level.
- If extremely fatigued and/or short of breath please contact our office.

Skin Sensitivity

- Take precautions with sun exposure. Use sunscreens, hats, and appropriate clothing.
- Notify our office if you experience any skin irritation, rashes or hives.

Fertility

- Chemotherapy drugs may affect fertility. Changes in, or temporary stopping of, menstrual periods can occur. Sperm counts may also be affected. Some drugs can cause fetal harm when given to pregnant women. A patient of either sex must use birth control measures. If interested in future family planning, discuss the possibility of sperm banking with our staff.
- While on chemotherapy you may experience a decreased sexual drive or other sexual problems.
- Women may experience vaginal dryness. Use Replens for intercourse.

Bleeding

- Notify our office if you experience any unusual bleeding or bruising.

Medications

- While receiving chemotherapy, check with your doctor before taking over-the-counter medications.
- Aspirin or any products containing aspirin should be avoided.
- Prescription refills – please call your pharmacist for all prescription refills. Please call for a refill at least one week before you need the medication.
- We will fill or refill pain medication prescriptions during regular office hours only. We cannot fill these prescriptions by telephone, and we do not fill on weekends, evenings or holidays.

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Nausea

- Take your anti-nausea medication as prescribed, the day of and the day after treatment, and when needed. Notify the infusion clinic staff if the medication is not effective.
- Try eating small amounts of bland, starchy foods such as toast, crackers, or cereal. Avoid greasy and spicy foods.
- Liquids such as tea, Gatorade, flat colas, Jell-O, Popsicles, lemonade and ice chips may be better tolerated than others.
- Avoid being around cooking odors.
- On the day of chemotherapy eat small frequent meals.

Loss of Appetite

- Try using your anti-nausea medication, noting any improvement in your appetite.
- Eat small frequent meals throughout the day.
- Discuss food supplements (Ensure, Sustacal, Boost, Scandi shakes, or Instant Breakfast) with the nurses. (Available at Target, Wal-Mart, Cub, etc.) Some taste better than others. Many patients prefer them chilled vs room temperature.
- An occasional glass of wine or cocktail may help improve your appetite – if approved by the doctor.
- Socializing may help improve your appetite. Plan on eating meals with someone.

Mouth Sores

- Mouth care is done to prevent mouth sores. Rinse mouth four times a day with one-teaspoon salt in a quart of water. Do not use commercial mouthwashes, especially alcohol based.
- Avoid hot, spicy, crunchy, or acidic foods.
- Notify our office if you have mouth or throat irritations. Report any white patches in mouth or on lips. Keep lips moistened with Blistex, Chapstick or Vaseline.
- Use a soft toothbrush when brushing teeth.
- Leave dentures out at night and clean daily.

Diarrhea

- Notify your doctor if you have had 5-6 (or more) loose stools in one day and/or any bloody diarrhea.
- Eat low fiber, bland foods. (Bananas, rice, applesauce, dry toast). Avoid milk products.
- Drink plenty of liquids as tolerated.
- Notify your doctor if abdominal pain or temperature greater than 101 degrees accompany diarrhea.

Constipation

- Take a stool softener according to package directions.
- Increase roughage in diet; bran, fresh fruits, and vegetables.
- If constipation persists for greater than 3 days or if you have abdominal pain call our office.

Fever

- Notify your doctor and/or infusion clinic staff without delay if your temperature is above 101 degrees F or shaking chills.
- Report any persistent cough or discomfort upon urination.
- Please consult the clinic staff prior to taking any Tylenol or Advil.
- Drink plenty of liquids.

Hair Loss

- Hair loss from chemotherapy is reversible.
- Hair loss is often delayed and may not occur for 2-6 weeks following your 1st chemotherapy treatment.
- You may choose to wear a wig, scarf, or a hat. The infusion clinic staff can refer you to suppliers for this.
- Avoid permanents or hair coloring at this time.

Pain

- For mild pain you may take Tylenol or Advil (Ibuprofen).
- Notify your MD if you are experiencing any new or increased pain unrelieved with Tylenol.