

Combating the Side Effects of Chemotherapy

Cancer treatments result in a number of side effects; however, there are many ways that caregivers can help.

Depression

Clinical depression is different from the sadness that most cancer patients experience and it is critical to assess accurately whether the patient is suffering from clinical depression, since depression is a treatable illness that can be managed by medication and/or psychotherapy.

If depression is suspected, contact a mental health professional. Have health care providers review all the medications the loved one is taking for depressive side effects.

Skin Problems

Cancer patients are at risk for numerous treatment- and disease-related skin impairments, including photosensitivity, rash, nail changes, bedsores, swelling, itching, and hair loss.

Caregivers can help these skin problems by encouraging the use of sunscreen, helping to protect affected areas from trauma, encouraging meticulous hygiene (keeping skin clean and dry), and making sure their loved one is eating healthy and drinking enough water.

Caregivers can also encourage the purchase of a wig prior to treatment (in order to match hair color to a wig), and can minimize hair loss by using baby shampoo, a soft hairbrush, and minimizing hair washing.

Appetite Changes

To combat nausea or lack of appetite, caregivers can encourage their loved one to:

- Eat five or six small meals each day, instead of three big meals.
- Eat with plastic forks or spoons if food tastes like metal. Use a glass pot for cooking.
- Talk with the doctor or nurse to make sure the anti-nausea medicine is being taken the right way.
- Eat less greasy, fried, salty, sweet, or spicy foods if they cause nausea.
- Let others do the cooking if the smell of food causes nausea.






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On treatment days, caregivers should encourage their loved one to:

- Talk with the nurse to learn about ways to relax if feeling sick before treatment.
- Learn the best time to eat and drink. Some people feel better when they eat a little just before treatment. Others feel better when they have nothing to eat or drink before treatment.
- After treatment, wait at least one hour before eating or drinking.

These foods and drinks may be easier on the stomach:

Soups	Drinks	Meals and Snacks	Fruits and Sweets
<p>Clear broth, such as chicken, beef and vegetable</p> 	<p>Clear soda such as ginger ale</p> <p>Cranberry or grape juice</p> <p>Oral rehydration solution drinks, such as Pedialyte®</p> <p>Tea</p> <p>Water</p> 	<p>Chicken – broiled or baked, without the skin</p> <p>Cream of Wheat® or Cream of Rice® cereal</p> <p>Crackers or pretzels</p> <p>Oatmeal</p> <p>Pasta or noodles</p> <p>Potatoes – boiled, without the skin</p> <p>White rice</p> <p>White toast</p>	<p>Bananas</p> <p>Canned fruit such as applesauce, peaches and pears</p> <p>Gelatin (Jell-O®)</p> <p>Popsicles and sherbet</p> <p>Yogurt (plain or vanilla)</p> 

Listen

Time is always a gift a caregiver can give.

There are no right or wrong ways of communicating and often for caregivers to just be there, perhaps giving a hug or holding hands, is enough to show the loved one that they care. Caregivers should be prepared for their loved one to talk about the illness if he or she chooses. Often those with cancer won't expect the caregiver to provide answers, but just to listen and understand so they don't feel so alone.

The aim of sensitive listening is to understand as completely as possible what the other person is feeling and to tune in to his or her thoughts and feelings as fully as possible. One can never completely understand another person, but the closer two people get and the better they understand each other, the better the communication will be.