

# Treatment Symptom Management Guide

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## Patient and Family Handbook

Information for Patients and Families

# How to Manage Your Fever

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## How to tell if you have a Fever

You have a fever if your temperature is:

**38.3°C or 100.9°F or higher at any time**

**OR**

**38°C or 100.4°F for 1 hour or more\***

\*If your temperature is 38°C, 38.1°C or 38.2°C, check it again in one hour

If your temperature remains 38°C or higher, you have a fever

**Go to the Emergency Department  
Show your fever card to the triage nurse**

\*Do not take Tylenol, Advil or Aspirin to lower your temperature unless an oncologist tells you to.

Keep a working thermometer at home. While you are on chemotherapy treatment, check your temperature if you feel hot or unwell (e.g. If you have chills)

*Adopted from the Walker Family Cancer centre chemotherapy toxicity management booklet*

# How to Manage Your Low White Blood Count

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## What is low white blood count or neutropenia?

Neutrophils are a type of white blood cell. White blood cells fight infections or germs. Neutropenia is when the white blood count in your blood is too low. Your body is less able to fight infection when your white blood cell count is low. Your white blood cells can drop low and then go back to normal without you ever getting an infection. But, the lower your white blood cells drop, the greater the chance of you getting an infection.

Symptoms:

Low white blood cells do not cause any symptoms. People with cancer mostly find out they have low white blood cell counts from a blood test or when they get an infection. An infection can start in almost any part of the body but may happen in the skin, stomach or lungs.

Common signs and symptoms of an infection:

- Fever and chills
- Swelling and redness
- Mouth sores, red or white patches in the mouth
- Severe cough or shortness of breath
- Pain or burning when peeing
- Diarrhea

***If you get a fever when your white blood count is low, it is very important to get medical attention right away. The Fever sheet tells you what a fever is and what to do.***

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## What can I do to help my white blood count?

### 1. Take medicine as ordered by your doctor

The medicines below may help boost white blood cell count. They can also help lower the chance of or treat infection.

Colony-stimulating factors:

- Colony-stimulating factors are special medicines called growth factors
- They help the bone marrow to make white blood cells

# How to Manage Your Low White Blood Count

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Antibiotics:

- Antibiotics are drugs that fight infections caused by bacteria
- You may be ordered antibiotics if your healthcare team thinks you have an infection.

## 2. You may need safety measures

You may have to be admitted to the hospital if your white blood count is low and you have a fever. Safety measures are put in place until your body can fight infection again.

These safety measures are:

- If you have visitors, they will have to wash their hands and may have to wear a mask and/or gown
- Anyone who feels unwell or has been in contact with an infectious disease (such as chickenpox or measles) should not visit

## 3. Your treatment may be delayed

If the white blood cell count is too low, chemotherapy is sometimes put off until it gets better.

## 4. Help stop infections from happening

Here are some tips to help stop an infection from happening.

Protect yourself from germs:

- Wash your hands often
- Always wash before eating and after using the washroom
- Carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer to clean your hands
- Clean the anal area gently but thoroughly after a bowel movement
- Take a warm, instead of hot, shower every day. Hot showers can dry out the skin
- Use a soft toothbrush to clean teeth and gums

# How to Manage Your Low White Blood Count

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Protect your skin:

- If your skin becomes dry, use moisturizing lotions to soften it and help it heal
- Wear rubber gloves when doing dishes, cleaning or gardening
- Use cuticle cream or cuticle remover instead of tearing or cutting the cuticles
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor to avoid cutting the skin
- Clean any cut or scrape at once with warm water and soap

Stay healthy:

- Get enough rest, eat foods from all the food groups, drink lots of fluids and exercise
- Stay away from anyone who has a cold, the flu or an infectious disease like chicken pox, mumps, measles or shingles
- Talk to your healthcare team about vaccinations

Food safety:

- Cook vegetables
- Wash and peel fruit
- Do not eat uncooked eggs, raw or undercooked meats, poultry, fish and seafood
- Avoid unpasteurized foods

*The information presented was gathered from CCS, ChemoCare and BC Cancer Agency.*

# How to Manage Your Low Red Blood Count

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## What is low red blood count or anemia?

Anemia is a condition caused by a low level of healthy red blood cells (RBCs). Cancer and its treatment can lower the number of RBCs and hemoglobin level in the blood. Hemoglobin is the part of red blood cells that carries oxygen. When hemoglobin levels are low, body tissues don't get enough oxygen and cannot work properly.

Symptoms of anemia include:

- Fatigue
  - Increased or irregular heart rate
  - Lack of energy
  - Low blood pressure
  - Pale skin
  - Chest pain
  - Dizziness
  - Poor appetite
  - Weakness
  - Feeling cold or chilled
  - Shortness of breath
  - Headache
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## What can I do to help my anemia?

### 1. Receive treatment

Once the cause of anemia is known, your healthcare team can suggest ways to treat it. Treatments will depend on the cause of anemia.

Supplements:

- Your doctor may prescribe medicines to help correct low levels of iron, vitamin B12 or folic acid
- Take iron pills or other medicines as prescribed by your doctor

Blood transfusions:

- You may need blood transfusions to lessen symptoms such as shortness of breath
- More than one blood transfusion may be needed

# How to Manage Your Low Red Blood Count

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Medications:

- There are medicines that work to increase Red Blood Cell production
- Not all medicines work for everyone. Talk to your doctor.

## 2. Learn to rest

It is very important to rest when your red blood cell count is low.

Try these tips:

- Get plenty of rest to keep up energy levels and help you cope with anemia and its effects
- Avoid strenuous or long periods of activity
- Limit activities that make you short of breath or make your heart beat faster
- Take rest breaks throughout the day
- Do the activities that are most important to you
- Move slowly to avoid getting dizzy
- When you get out of bed, sit on the side of the bed for a while before standing up
- Ask others for help

## 3. Eat & drink well

Eating a well-balanced meal and drinking lots of fluids will give you the energy you need to heal.

These tips will help you eat and drink well:

- Eat a balanced diet that include foods high in iron
- These foods include green leafy vegetables, liver and cooked red meats
- Drink plenty of water
- Limit your intake of coffee and alcohol

*The information presented was gathered from CCS and ChemoCare.*

# How to Manage Your Low Platelet Count

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## What is cancer-related low platelet count or thrombocytopenia?

Thrombocytopenia is a condition caused by a low number of platelets in the blood. Cancer and/or cancer treatments can lower the number of platelets. Platelets are also called thrombocytes. They are made in the bone marrow and help the blood to clot. People with a low number of platelets may bleed or bruise easily, even after a minor injury. A low platelet count increases the risk of bleeding, especially from the mouth, nose and gastrointestinal tract.

Symptoms:

Symptoms of thrombocytopenia usually aren't seen until the number of platelets is very low. Symptoms of low platelet count may begin soon after chemotherapy starts but they are usually at their worst 10-14 days after you first receive chemotherapy.

Common symptoms include:

- Bruising easily
- Tiny red spots under the skin
- Unusual bleeding from the gums or nose
- Blood in the urine
- Blood in the stool
- A lot or long-lasting bleeding from a small cut

***Go directly to the Emergency Room if you have put firm pressure on a nose bleed or cut and bleeding does not stop after 10 minutes.***

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## What can I do to help my low platelet count?

### 1. Make small changes to your diet

Making small changes to what you eat and drink can help lessen the chance of bleeding and bruising.

Try these diet tips if your platelet count is low:

- Avoid foods that are sharp, crunchy, spicy or acidic
- Eat a soft diet, such as soup, mashed potatoes, custards, Jell-O or pudding
- Do not drink alcohol
- Drink plenty of fluids and eat enough fibre to avoid constipation

\*Talk to your oncologist if you are taking aspirin.

# How to Manage Your Low Platelet Count

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## 2. Prevent bleeding and bruising

You can try the following to help prevent bleeding or bruising if your platelet counts are low.

Use good mouth care:

- Rinse and brush your teeth after you eat
- Brush your teeth gently with an extra-soft toothbrush, cotton swabs or gauze
- Soften your toothbrush with hot water before each use

Protect your body:

- Limit activities or contact sports that might result in an injury or bruising
- Bend your knees and squat instead of bending over. This keeps the head above the level of the heart and avoids extra pressure on the blood vessels in the head and neck
- Use an electric razor instead of a disposable razor
- Wear protective gloves when working in the garden or near plants that have thorns
- Use pads instead of tampons during menstruation

## 3. Manage your bleeding

Contact your healthcare team at 905-682-6451 or go to the Emergency Room if any of the following bleeding problems get worse or cannot be controlled after 10 minutes.

Nosebleeds:

- If you get a nosebleed, sit up with your head titled forward
- Press a cold cloth on both sides of your nose continuously for 10 minutes
- You can also apply a cold cloth to the back of your neck

Bleeding of the gums or in the mouth:

- If you can easily reach the bleeding area, apply gentle pressure until it stops
- If you can't apply pressure to the area, hold ice water in your mouth or suck on a popsicle or ice cube until the bleeding stops

# How to Manage Your Low Platelet Count

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Bleeding from a cut:

- Hold a clean dry cloth against the cut for at least 10 minutes
- If possible, lift the injured body part above the level of the heart
- Do not apply a tourniquet to control bleeding because this can cause permanent tissue damage

Bleeding under the skin that is spreading or swelling:

- Hold a soft cloth or an ice pack on the area with gentle but firm pressure for 10 minutes

## 4. Medical help may be needed

If the platelet count is very low and you are bleeding or have a lot of bruising, you may need a platelet transfusion. Transfused platelets only last about 3 days so some people may need more than one transfusion.

*The information presented was gathered from CCS and ChemoCare.*

# How to Manage Your Hair Loss

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## What is chemotherapy-related alopecia?

Chemotherapy-related alopecia is hair loss caused by chemotherapy. Not every type of chemotherapy causes hair loss. Chemotherapy attacks fast growing cells. Cancer cells are fast growing and so are the cells that grow your hair. Hair can fall out all at once, in patches or slowly.

How much hair loss and how long it takes to grow back depends on:

- The type of drug
- The dose of drug
- Length of treatment
- Personal factors

Hair loss is usually temporary. It may start 1-3 weeks after the first treatment and may start to grow back 6-8 weeks after the last treatment. Hair that grows back may be of a slightly different colour or texture. The new hair may be finer or coarser, lighter or darker, straight or curly. These changes are usually temporary. It may take one year or longer before hair completely grows back and returns to its original state.

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## What can I do about my hair loss?

### 1. Make changes to how you care for your hair

Try these tips when washing and drying your hair:

- Wash the hair on your head less often once it starts to fall out
- Use a mild protein shampoo twice a week and massage the scalp
- Use a soft hair brush and a hair dryer set on low heat or let your hair dry naturally
- For long or medium-length hair, get a shorter cut to make hair look fuller and thicker

Try to avoid the following:

- Avoid rubbing your hair dry and instead pat your hair
- Avoid curling irons, straightening irons and hot rollers
- Avoid perms, hair colour, bleach, peroxide ammonia and lacquer during treatment
- Talk to your healthcare team about when it is okay to use these products again

# How to Manage Your Hair Loss

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## 2. Protect your scalp

Protect your scalp from the sun when outdoors.

These tips can help you protect your scalp:

- Wear a wide-brimmed hat or scarf
- Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30
- Wear a hat or scarf in cold weather to reduce the loss of body heat
- Use a satin or satin-like pillowcase. This will prevent pulling on your hair while you sleep

## 3. Find support

Support from family, friends and your community can make you feel better.

These tips can help you get support:

- Talk to someone you trust and who is a good listener
- Join a cancer support program to share stories with other people
- Talk to others who have experienced hair loss
- Attend the "Look Good, Feel Better" program at Wellspring for help with wigs, scarves, skin care and makeup. There is no fee for the 2-hour workshop where you will learn simple cosmetic tips and gain confidence through the support from other women

# How to Manage Your Mouth Problems

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## What are cancer-related mouth problems?

The most common mouth problems for people with cancer are: dry mouth and lips, mouth sores, cold sores, sticky saliva, taste changes, trouble or pain with swallowing, too much saliva (spit), tooth and gum problems, a stiff jaw, bad breath, burning mouth and feeling thirsty.

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## What can I do to help my mouth problems?

### 1. Go to the dentist before you start cancer treatments

Chemotherapy puts you at risk of bleeding and infection. You will not be able visit the dentist for a cleaning or other dental procedures until 4-6 weeks after your last chemotherapy treatment. If you need emergency dental work tell your cancer care team. They will give you special instructions.

### 2. Keep your mouth clean

Keep your teeth, gums and mouth as clean as you can while you are getting cancer treatments.

Rinse your mouth:

- Homemade mouth rinse mix together 1 teaspoon of salt, 1 teaspoon of baking soda and 4 cups of water. Keep the mouth rinse at room temperature and make a fresh batch every day.
- Rinse every 1-2 hours if your mouth is dry or sore. Otherwise 4-5 times a day.
- Rinse after eating meals or snack
- Put some mouth rinse into a smaller bottle to take with you when you go out
- Do not use mouthwashes with alcohol (like Scope and Listerine).They can dry out your mouth

Brush your teeth:

- Brush your teeth, gums and tongue after eating and before bed
- Use a small, soft, rounded-end, bristled toothbrush
- Run hot water over your toothbrush to soften the bristles before brushing
- Change your toothbrush when the bristles do not stand up straight or after you have been treated for an oral yeast infection

# How to Manage Your Mouth Problems

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Other tips:

- Wash your hands often and keep them away from your mouth
- Limit stress and sunlight if you have cold sores or have gotten them in the past
- Do not touch any lips sores

## 3. Keep your mouth and lips moist

Moisturize your mouth:

- Use your homemade mouth rinse to keep your mouth moist
- If you suck on lozenges, make sure they are sugar free (sweeteners like Xylitol are okay)

Moisturize your lips:

- Use animal or plant based lip balms with bees-wax, lanolin or cocoa butter
- Do not use petroleum based lip balm

## 4. Change your diet

Eating and drinking can be uncomfortable if you have mouth problems from cancer and treatment.

Tips for eating when you have a sore mouth:

- Have room temperature food and drinks instead of hot and cold
- Try mashing, blending, chopping or grinding your food to make it softer
- Moisten food by adding olive oil, sauce, broth, sour cream, gravy or cream soup
- Do not eat spicy or acidic foods (like citrus, pickles or tomatoes) or drink fizzy drinks
- Avoid foods that are rough, dry or have sharp edges that might scratch

# How to Manage Your Mouth Problems

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Tips for eating when you have a dry mouth:

- Carry a water bottle or thermos so you can drink whenever your mouth feels dry
- Warm liquids may help to clear thick saliva and wash down your food
- Suck on sugarless hard candies to make saliva
- Dunk solid foods in soup, milk or warm drinks to soften them
- Avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, and cola), alcohol and smoking

Tips for eating when you have taste changes:

- Eat foods that need less chewing
- Try different forms of foods, like fresh, frozen or canned
- Experiment with foods, spices and seasonings

## 5. Quit smoking

Smoking can make your mouth problems worse but quitting is hard.

Your pharmacist or doctor can help you make a plan to quit smoking. They can:

- Suggest nicotine replacements (like the patch or gum)
- Refer you to a smoking cessation program

*The information presented was gathered from CCO.*

# How to Manage Your Nausea & Vomiting

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## What is cancer-related nausea and vomiting?

Nausea is an unpleasant feeling in the back of your throat and stomach. It can make you have more saliva (spit), clammy skin, a fast heart rate or feel light-headed. Vomiting is “throwing-up” the stomach contents through the mouth. Vomiting may or may not happen with nausea. When your stomach is empty you may have retching or “dry heaves”.

***Nausea and vomiting are serious symptoms of cancer treatment that can have a big impact on your life. It is important to get help as soon as possible.***

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## What can I do to manage my nausea and vomiting?

### 1. Take anti-nausea medications

It is easier to prevent nausea with medications than it is to treat it once it starts.

Tips to remember:

- Take your medication as your health care team prescribed
- No medication can control nausea and vomiting all of the time
- Most anti-nausea medications take 20-60 minutes before they start to work

What should I do if I vomit?

- Stop eating and drinking for 30-60 minutes. Then start eating and drinking slowly in this order:
  1. Clear liquids (water, ice chips, watered down juice, broth, gelatin, popsicles)
  2. Dry starchy food (crackers or dry toast)
  3. Protein rich foods (chicken, fish or eggs)
  4. Dairy foods (yogurt, milk or cheese)

To keep your mouth clean, rinse with a bland rinse after vomiting. Homemade mouth rinse:

- Mix together: 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon baking soda, 4 cups of water

# How to Manage Your Nausea & Vomiting

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## 2. Learn to relax

Relaxation exercises can help you feel more in control of your mind and your body when you get nauseous.

These activities can help you relax:

- Deep breathing exercises
- Take a walk outside or breathe fresh air through an open window
- Watch TV or a movie

## 3. Drink & eat well

Tips on drinking:

- Sip small amounts of liquids often during the day
- Drink at least 6-8 cups of liquids per day
- Drink liquids and eat foods separately, at least 30 minutes apart
- Drink liquids even when you do not feel thirsty

Tips on eating:

- Eat small amounts every 2-3 hours
- Try foods that are dry, starchy or bland, like crackers, pretzels, dry toast or cereal
- If you feel better, add more food, like broth soups, fish, skim or 1% milk and fruit
- Try limiting very spicy foods, onions, cream, eggs and pastries

If the smell of food or drinks bothers you:

- Drink liquids through a straw to avoid their smell
- Eat cold or room temperature foods
- Open a window or use a fan to get rid of food smells in the room
- If possible, stay out of the kitchen. Ask someone else to prepare meals or buy prepared meals

# How to Manage Your Nausea & Vomiting

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## 4. Make lifestyle changes

These tips can help you make lifestyle changes:

- Wear loose clothing. Clothing that is tight around the waist can make nausea worse
- Relax and take your time while eating
- Sit up for 30-60 minutes after eating
- Rinse your mouth with a bland rinse before eating to keep it clean and moist
- Suck on hard candies or lemon drops to get rid of bad tastes in your mouth

## 5. Use complementary therapies

These therapies may help you feel better:

- Acupuncture
- Hypnosis
- Distraction techniques
- Music therapy

*The information presented was gathered from CCO.*

# How to Manage Your Loss of Appetite

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## What is cancer-related loss of appetite?

Loss of appetite is when you do not have feelings of hunger or interest in food. If you are not able to eat you may lose weight and not be strong enough for your treatments.

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## What can I do when I do not feel like eating?

### 1. Ask for a referral to a registered dietitian

A dietitian can help you make a plan to eat and drink when you have no appetite.

### 2. Make every bite count

You need to get enough calories, protein and liquids in your diet to keep up your strength and keep going with your treatments.

Eat and drink often:

- Eat small meals more often instead of 2 or 3 big ones
- Try to have a few mouthfuls of food every 1-2 hours even if you do not feel hungry
- Have easy to eat, nutritious snacks with you like, cheese & crackers, pudding cups, hummus & veggies and yogurt

### 3. Choose food and drinks that are high in protein

Protein helps your body heal when you are going through cancer treatment.

These foods are high in protein:

- Dairy products like milk, Greek yogurt, pudding and cheese
- Meat, poultry, fish, seafood
- Tofu, soy beverages, nuts, seeds, peanut butter
- Dried peas, beans and lentils
- Eggs

# How to Manage Your Loss of Appetite

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Tips on how to add more protein to your diet:

- Make high protein milk → add 1 cup of skim milk powder to 4 cups of whole milk. Use the high-protein milk in cream soups, stews, gravies and sauces
- Add protein powder to liquid foods or baking

## 4. Add more fat to your food

Here are some simple ways to make your foods more calorie rich.

Add:	To:
Olive oil, butter or margarine	Noodles, rice and breads
Gravy or sauces	Mashed potatoes and meats
Cream, honey, maple syrup or jams	Fruits, yogurts and desserts
Mayonnaise	Salad dressings, sandwiches, tuna and egg salad
Whipping cream	Soups, custards, fresh fruits, smoothies or sauce
Avocado	Sandwiches, quesadillas or mash it and use as a dip
Nuts and nut butters	Toast, smoothies, snacks
Full fat cheese	Sandwiches, melted on veggies, in sauces or as a snack
Sour cream	Potatoes, dips

## 5. Drink at least 6-8 cups of liquids each day

Use these tips to help you get enough liquids:

- Drink often throughout the day. Choose liquids with calories like juice, milk, soup and fruit smoothies
- Keep a water bottle with you, filled with your favourite drink
- Limit drinks with caffeine (cola, coffee, tea) and alcohol

# How to Manage Your Loss of Appetite

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## 6. Eat whatever foods appeal to you

Eat whatever tastes good to you, whenever you feel up to it. Do not worry about sticking to your usual schedule for meals.

Try these tips when deciding when & what to eat:

- Eat your biggest meal of the day when you feel your best. If you feel best in the morning, eat more then
- Eat breakfast foods for dinner or dinner foods for breakfast
- Eat your favourite foods at any time of the day
- Use smaller plates or bowls

## 7. Eat convenience foods if you have trouble preparing meals

Try these tips to make preparing meals easier:

- Contact your local community meal service program (like Meals on Wheels)
- Buy frozen foods that are easy to put in the oven
- Buy pre-cut vegetables, fruits, cheese and other quick snacks
- Use the deli counter for pre-prepared meats, salads and other foods

*The information presented was gathered from CCO.*

# How to Manage Your Constipation

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## What is cancer-related constipation?

Constipation means that you are having bowel movements (going poo) less often than normal and the stool (poo) is often dry and hard to pass. Constipation is common for people with cancer.

You may be constipated if:

- You have to push hard and strain to get anything to come out
  - You feel the need to have a bowel movement but nothing will come out
  - The stool is small, hard, dry, and looks like pellets
  - You have stomach ache or cramps
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## What can I do to manage my constipation?

### 1. Use laxatives to manage constipation

Laxatives are medicines that help you have a bowel movement. There are many different kinds. Some you buy over-the-counter and some your doctor prescribes.

Be safe when taking laxatives:

- Do not take fibre supplements, like Metamucil, unless your health care team told you to
- You may get mild stomach cramps when you take laxatives. If the cramping is very painful, or if you get diarrhea, stop taking the medication and speak to your doctor

### 2. Drink more liquids

Liquids add water to your stool, making it softer and easier to pass.

These tips can help you drink more liquids:

- Drink at least 6-8 cups of liquids each day. Water is best but any liquid will help
- Hot drinks can help you have a bowel movement
- If drinking liquids is hard, take small sips often or eat watery fruit

# How to Manage Your Constipation

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## 3. Be active

Exercise can help to keep you regular. Even a little bit of activity may help.

Tips on being active:

- If you are not active, start with light exercise like walking, gentle yoga or stretching
- Walk to the end of your driveway, up and down your hallway or use a stationary bike
- Go at your own pace and slowly raise the amount and difficulty of exercise

## 4. Eat more fibre

If you have mild constipation, eating more fibre may help. High fibre foods help make your stool softer and easier to pass.

Be safe when eating more fibre:

- If you eat a lot of fibre from grains, make sure you also drink a lot of liquids. If you do not drink enough your constipation may get worse
- If you take opioid pain medication, ask your health care team if eating more fibre is right for you
- If you have been told that you could get a bowel obstruction (a blockage that stops stool [poo] from coming out), check with your health care team before adding fibre to your diet

High Fibre Foods	
Fruits	Natural laxatives like prunes, prune juice, papaya and rhubarb Fresh fruit like avocados, berries, apples, pears, bananas, mangos, plums and figs Eat the skin on fruits like apples and pears because the skin has the most fibre
Veggies	Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, beets, cabbage, corn, peas, artichokes and carrots Leafy greens like spinach, kale, Swiss chard and collard greens Add greens to a smoothie to up the fibre
Grains	Barley, oat bran, brown rice, wild rice, quinoa, cornmeal and bulgur wheat Whole grain crackers, pasta, pancakes, waffles and bagels Try adding wheat bran to foods like soups, mashed potatoes and casseroles
Protein	Kidney beans, navy beans, chickpeas, lentils, peas and black beans Nuts, like almonds, pistachios, pecans, sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds Try adding beans to soups and salads

# How to Manage Your Constipation

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## 5. Make a bathroom routine

These tips can help you make a bathroom routine:

- Make sure you are alone and comfortable when using the bathroom
- Try to go to the bathroom around the same time each day
- Try to have a bowel movement first thing in the morning or after a meal
- If you can, get up out of bed to use the bathroom or commode, instead of a bedpan
- Put a low footstool under your feet when sitting on the toilet. This puts you in a better position
- Do not push hard or strain when trying to pass stool. Take your time and try to relax

*The information presented was gathered from CCO.*

# How to Manage Your Diarrhea

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## What is cancer-related diarrhea?

Diarrhea is loose, watery or unformed stool (poo) that might look like many little flakes or pieces. Individuals can have 3 or 4 watery bowel movements a day. Diarrhea may cause an urgent need to go to the bathroom and you may not be able to stop yourself from having a bowel movement (going poo).

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## What can I do to manage diarrhea?

### 1. Take anti-diarrhea medication

Be safe when taking anti-diarrhea:

- Check with your pharmacist before taking over-the-counter medication that has bismuth subsalicylate (like Pepto Bismol) or loperamide (like Imodium), to make sure it is safe for you to use
- Some medications, like metoclopramide, domperidone and antacids with magnesium, can make your diarrhea worse. Stop taking them while you have diarrhea, unless your doctor has told you it is ok
- Some herbal medicines and natural health products like saw palmetto, ginseng, milk thistle, plantago seed, and aloe may make your diarrhea worse

### 2. Drink lots of fluids

Diarrhea can cause dehydration. Drinking more will not stop your diarrhea, but it will help make up for the liquids you lose.

#### ***Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of fluids each day.***

Tips on drinking more liquids:

- Drink an extra cup of liquid for every watery bowel movement you have. Sports drinks are a good choice
- Drink small amounts many times during the day
- Drink liquids slowly
- Warm or room temperature liquids may be easier to drink
- If you want to drink juice, dilute it with water. Mix half juice and half water

# How to Manage Your Diarrhea

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Be safe:

- If your diarrhea is severe (more than 7 times a day) you may need to get liquids intravenously (through an IV) to keep you hydrated

## 3. Change your diet

If you have mild diarrhea, eating less fibre may help. Try to remove all skins, peels, membranes and seeds from fruits and vegetables.

Drinks & foods to help ease diarrhea	Drinks & foods you should limit
Water, clear juice, ice chips or popsicles	Pop and fizzy drinks
Flat non-fizzy, non-caffeinated drinks	Caffeine
Broth, strained clear soup	Alcohol
Fruit like peeled pears, apples and apricots	Prune juice, fruit juice with pulp
Breads and low fibre cereals, white rice and tapioca	Whole wheat breads, high fibre cereals and grains
Protein from foods like eggs, meat, chicken, yogurt and smooth peanut butter	Raw vegetables and dried fruits like prunes and raisins

## 4. Plan for outings

Sometimes diarrhea can cause an urgent need to get to a bathroom. Try to plan ahead so you can feel more comfortable leaving home.

How to plan ahead:

- Find the nearest bathroom before you need it when you go out
- Bring a change of clothes in case of an accident
- If you think an accident may happen, wear absorbent, throw-away underwear

# How to Manage Your Diarrhea

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## 5. Take care of your skin

When you have diarrhea, the skin around your bum area can get damaged and be painful. To avoid infection or feeling uncomfortable, use these tips to take care of your skin:

Take a sitz bath:

- A sitz bath is a warm, soothing soak for your perineal or bum area
- Recipe for a sitz bath → add 1-2 tablespoons of baking soda or 1-2 teaspoons of salt to the water
- You can use your bathtub, a large basin or a plastic sitz bath that fits over a toilet seat
- Soak your bottom for about 10-15 minutes each time

If your skin is still sore, try:

- Wearing cotton underwear with no elastic around the leg holes. Large boxer shorts are great for both men and women
- Your health care team may give you an ointment or cream to protect open skin
- Over-the-counter creams and ointments with zinc oxide may help heal the skin

*The information presented was gathered from CCO.*

# How to Manage Your Fatigue

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## What is cancer-related fatigue?

Cancer-related fatigue is a feeling of tiredness that can last a long time and does not go away with rest or sleep. It is different than the fatigue you felt before you had cancer. Fatigue is usually worse during treatment. Your fatigue can range from mild to severe.

Fatigue can make you feel:

- Very tired, weak, heavy or slow
- Like you can't think or remember things
- Like you don't have the energy to see people or do activities

***Fatigue is the most common symptom felt by people with cancer. It is a normal part of your cancer treatment.***

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## What can I do to manage my fatigue?

### 1. Be active

Exercise is a great way to improve your energy and make your fatigue better. Aim to get 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days. The exercise should not be too hard. You should be able to talk easily while you are exercising.

Examples of exercises:

- Walking
- Yoga
- Lifting weights
- Swimming
- Cycling

Be safe when exercising:

- Stop and rest if you feel sore, stiff or out of breath
- Always talk to your health care team about how to exercise safely
- You can exercise at any time during or after treatment

# How to Manage Your Fatigue

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## 2. Pace yourself

Use your energy wisely in order to do the things that are most important to you.

Follow the 4 Ps:

- Plan Ahead → plan your day with time to rest before and after activities
- Prioritize → decide which activities are most important & save your energy for those
- Pace → do one activity at a time, without rushing
- Position → sit when you do things, if possible

## 3. Improve your sleep

Getting a good sleep can give you more energy.

These tips can help you improve your sleep:

- Morning → Wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends
- Daytime → Take short naps (less than 1 hour) between 12 and 3pm in a room other than your bedroom
- Evening → Before going to bed, lower the lights and do activities like reading, listening to music or taking a warm bath. Try activities like prayer, mediation, and imagery. Turn off all screens like computers, TV's and iPads at least one hour before going to bed
- Bedtime → Use your bed for sleep and intimacy/sex only. If you can't fall asleep after 20 to 30 minutes, get out of bed until you feel sleepy and then go back to bed

## 4. Manage stress & emotions

Talking to someone about your feelings and doing activities to help with stress and anxiety can help your fatigue.

These tips can help you manage your stress and emotions:

- Change or stay away from situations that cause you stress
- Distract yourself by playing games or talking with friends
- Focus on positive things and things you can control

# How to Manage Your Fatigue

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Try these relaxing activities to help you reduce your stress:

- Yoga, meditation or clearing your mind
- Hypnosis, massage, music therapy

Talk to your doctor before taking any herbal therapies. Some herbal remedies may interfere with cancer treatments.

## 5. Be patient

Feeling better will take time. Small changes can improve your fatigue over time.

These tips can help you make changes:

- Listen to your body
- Start slowly and make changes one at a time
- Set easy, realistic goals
- Recognize and celebrate what you achieve along the way

*The information presented was gathered from CCO.*

# How to Manage Your Shortness of Breath

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## What is cancer-related shortness of breath?

Shortness of breath is the feeling of not having enough air to breathe. It can also be an uncomfortable feeling while you are breathing. You can have shortness of breath when resting or when you are doing something physical, no matter how small the activity.

## What happens during shortness of breath?

- Your breathing gets shallower and faster and you may feel like you do not get as much oxygen from your breaths
  - Your muscles then begin to tense and you start to feel nervous to do things
  - The fear of not being able to breathe makes your shortness of breath worse
- .....

## What can I do to manage my shortness of breath?

### 1. Learn breathing exercises and positions

Breathing exercises can be helpful, especially if you have severe shortness of breath.

Abdominal breathing:

- Use this exercise if you feel breathless after an activity. Follow these steps:
  1. Relax your shoulders
  2. Place one hand on your abdomen (belly) just below your chest
  3. Count 1, 2, 3, 4, as you take a breath in and feel your abdomen rise slowly
  4. Breathe out slowly with pursed lips as you count 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
  5. Repeat this 3-4 times

# How to Manage Your Shortness of Breath

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Recovery breathing:

- Use this exercise any time you feel very breathless or panicky. Follow these steps:
  1. Drop your chin
  2. Breathe in and out while focusing on your breath
  3. Purse your lips and little by little, blow out for longer periods
  4. Once your breathing slows down, sit up straight and do 2-3 abdominal breaths
  5. Rest for a few minutes before starting your activities again

## 2. Do relaxation exercises

Relaxing can help you to slow your breathing and make your breaths more effective. Follow these steps:

1. Relax or close your eyes
2. Now breathe gently
3. Try to think of something pleasant and create a picture in your mind
4. You may like to listen to music to help you relax

## 3. Make lifestyle changes

Pace yourself:

- Break your activities down into smaller steps
- Plan your activities so that you have time to do them slowly and comfortably
- Keep things that you use often close by and within easy reach

Do things in ways that use less energy:

- Sit down when doing chores and getting dressed
- Avoid heavy lifting. Carry things at your waist or hold them close to your chest
- Keep your phone close by and stop to catch your breath when you are having a conversation

# How to Manage Your Shortness of Breath

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Showering or bathing:

- Keep the bath water shallow and lukewarm
- Open a window in the bathroom to let in fresh air and let out steam
- Sit in the shower

To climb stairs:

- Stand close to the stairs with one hand on the railing beside you
- Breathe in as you lift your leg up
- Breathe out as you place your leg on the step and raise yourself up

## 4. Use devices to help you save your energy

Some devices can help to cut down on the work your body needs to do in order to breath.

Tips on using devices to save your energy:

- Use pillows to raise your head when lying down
- Use a reclining chair with a footrest when sitting
- Use a walker or wheelchair if you need them
- Try using a cool fan across your face to breathe easier

## 5. Quit smoking

Smoking can make your shortness of breath worse. Quitting smoking is the best decision you can make, but quitting is hard. Your pharmacist or doctor can help you make a plan.

They can:

- Suggest nicotine replacements (like the patch or gum)
- Prescribe medication to help you quit
- Refer you to a smoking cessation program

*The information presented was gathered from CCO.*

# How to Manage Your Anxiety

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## What is cancer-related anxiety?

Cancer-related anxiety is a feeling of worry, fear or being nervous. It can come and go. Things like starting treatment or waiting for test results can make anxiety worse.

Low-level anxiety can make you:

- Feel restless, worried and like you cannot relax
- Have tense muscles
- Have trouble sleeping

High-level anxiety can cause anxiety attacks that come on quickly and are strong. They can cause:

- Feelings of doom
  - Shortness of breath
  - Dizziness and nausea
  - Chest pains
- .....

## What can I do to help my anxiety?

### 1. Find support

Support from family, friends and your community can make you feel better and less alone.

These tips can help you get support:

- Talk to someone you trust and who is a good listener
- Talk to someone at your place of worship
- Join a cancer support program to share stories with other people
- Talk to a social worker about support programs at your cancer centre

# How to Manage Your Anxiety

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## 2. Focus on things that make you feel better

Think about the positive parts of your life and things you can control.

These tips can help you feel better:

- Feel grateful for the things and people that bring you joy
- Spend time with people who make you laugh
- Try to avoid negative people and things that cause you stress

## 3. Face your fears

Anxiety can cause you to avoid people or situations that make you feel anxious. This is called avoidance behaviour.

Different types of anxiety can cause you to avoid different things:

- Panic disorder → crowds
- Social anxiety → interacting with people
- Phobias → things like needles or closed in spaces, like MRI machines

Tell your health care team if you feel anxious about tests, treatments, or appointments. They can help.

## 4. Improve your sleep

Getting good sleep can give you more energy and help you feel better emotionally.

These tips can help improve your sleep:

- Do relaxing activities like reading or listening to music before going to bed
- If you do not fall asleep after 20-30 minutes, get out of bed. Only go back to bed when you feel like you may be able to fall asleep

# How to Manage Your Anxiety

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## 5. Exercise and take care of your body

Exercise is a good way to help your anxiety and improve your mood.

Try these tips when exercising:

- Choose an activity you like that suits your health and fitness level
- Start slowly with light exercise like walking, swimming or yoga
- Go at your own pace. Slowly increase the amount and difficulty of your activities

## 6. Avoid alcohol and quit smoking

- Even small amounts of alcohol can affect the way you feel
- The nicotine in cigarettes can also make your anxiety worse
- It may help to cut down or quit smoking but sometimes people feel more nervous or on edge when they are quitting
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about making a plan that is right for you

*The information presented was gathered from CCO.*

# How to Manage Your Depression

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## What is cancer-related depression?

Depression is when feelings of sadness are strong and will not go away for weeks or months. It causes other physical and emotional symptoms too. Depression affects your quality of life and can lead to thoughts of suicide.

## What are the symptoms of depression?

- Physical symptoms → low energy; feeling sluggish or restless and agitated; sleeping and eating more or less than before
- Emotional/mental symptoms → feeling hopeless or worthless; not enjoying things you used to enjoy; feelings of guilt or regret; wanting to die; worsened anxiety
- People with cancer who have depression may want to stop treatment, worry a lot about cancer returning, focus on bad outcomes or not look after their health

***If you are thinking about suicide or harming yourself call 911 or go to your nearest Emergency Department right away.***

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## What can I do to help my depression?

### 1. Find support

Support from family, friends and your community can make you feel better and less alone.

These tips can help you get support:

- Talk to someone you trust who is a good listener
- Talk to someone at your place of worship
- Join a cancer support program to share stories with other people
- Talk to a social worker about support programs at your cancer centre

# How to Manage Your Depression

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## 2. Focus on things that make you feel better

Focus on the positive parts of your life and things you can control.

- Feel grateful for the things and people that bring you joy
- Spend time with people who make you laugh
- Try to avoid negative people and things that cause you stress
- Avoid or limit alcohol as it can lower your mood

## 3. Eat well

A balanced diet can help you feel more energetic and positive.

These tips can help you eat well:

- Eat something every 3 to 4 hours. You need fuel often to keep your mind and body working at their best
- Keep healthy snacks on hand like nuts, fruit, vegetables and yogurt
- Eat foods rich in omega 3 fatty acids like, fish, flax seeds and walnuts. These foods can help improve your mood

## 4. Exercise and take care of your body

Exercise is a good way to improve your mood. It makes endorphins, which are chemicals in your body that are natural pain killers and mood boosters.

Try these tips when exercising:

- Choose an activity you like that suits your health and fitness level
- Start slowly with light exercise like walking, swimming or yoga
- Go at your own pace. Slowly increase the amount and difficulty of your exercise

# How to Manage Your Depression

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## 5. Improve your sleep

Getting good sleep can help to give you more energy and feel better emotionally.

These tips can help you improve your sleep:

- Set a time for planning and worrying in the early evening so you do not think about these things when you are trying to fall asleep
- Do relaxing activities like reading or listening to music before going to bed
- If you do not fall asleep after 20-30 minutes, get out of bed. Only go back to bed when you feel like you may be able to fall asleep

## 6. Make lists of calming, enjoyable and useful activities

When you feel sad or down, get your list and choose an activity.

Include:

- Things you enjoy, like going for a walk, watching your favourite TV shows, or taking a bath
- Things you need to do, like chores and appointments

*The information presented was gathered from CCO.*

# How to Manage Your Pain

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## What is cancer-related pain?

Cancer pain causes you to hurt, feel uncomfortable or suffer. You may feel pain all of the time or only some of the time. Getting relief from pain is important.

Treating your pain will help you:

- Sleep and eat better
- Enjoy time with family and friends
- Do your work and hobbies

***You do not have to accept pain as a normal part of living with cancer.***

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## What can I do to manage my pain?

### 1. Take your pain medications as prescribed

Your doctor might prescribe more than one type of pain medication.

Types of medications may be:

- Over-the-counter medications that have acetaminophen (like Tylenol) or ibuprofen (like Advil)
- Opioids, like codeine, morphine, hydromorphone, oxycodone, fentanyl and methadone
- Medications for nerve pain like pregabalin and gabapentin. These medications may take days or even weeks to start working.

Be safe when taking medication:

- Never crush or chew long-acting medications (pills or capsules). This may put too much medication into your body too fast and give you side effects. If swallowing pills is hard, ask your doctor or pharmacist about a different way to take them
- Do not stop taking your pain medication suddenly. Many of these medications need to be stopped slowly
- Ask your health care team about what to do if you miss a dose of medication
- Always check with your pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medications

# How to Manage Your Pain

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Side-effects of pain medication are common. Medication may cause:

- Constipation - not being able to have a bowel movement (go poo). Constipation from opioid medication will not go away on its own. A laxative needs to be taken the whole time you take opioid pain medication.
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up)
- Sleepiness or drowsiness

## 2. Be active & exercise

Even small, simple exercises may help your pain. Start slowly and go at your own pace.

Examples of exercise:

- Walk to the end of your driveway or up and down your hallway
- Ride an indoor bike or do gentle yoga and stretching

## 3. Get physical relief

Ask your health care team about other treatments before you use them, like:

- Muscle relaxants and rubs
- Using heat and/or ice on the body
- Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) machine

Heat and ice may not be safe if you are getting radiation therapy, chemotherapy, or if you have numbness from nerve damage. Ask your health care team.

## 4. Try relaxing activities

Relaxing activities and managing stress may help to control your pain.

These activities may help you relax:

- Breathing exercises
- Distraction activities like watching TV or playing computer games
- Healthy coping activities like walking outside, gardening, enjoying nature, reading or listening to music

# How to Manage Your Pain

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Some patients find complementary therapies help them take control of their pain:

- Meditation
- Hypnotism
- Aromatherapy
- Yoga
- Massage
- Music therapy

## 5. Find support

It is normal to feel upset and frustrated when you are in pain. You can find support in your community and through your health care team.

Tips on where to find support:

- Talk to someone you trust about how your pain makes you feel
- Talk to a trained counsellor either by yourself or as part of a group
- Talk to someone at your place of worship
- Join a peer support group online or in your community

*The information presented was gathered from CCO.*

# How to Manage Your Peripheral Neuropathy

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## What is cancer-related peripheral neuropathy?

Cancer-related peripheral neuropathy can be caused by cancer or its treatment. Peripheral neuropathy means nerves in your body have been damaged.

## What are the symptoms of peripheral neuropathy?

Symptoms of peripheral neuropathy depend on which nerves are affected and how bad the injury is to the nerves.

Symptoms include:

- Numbness, tingling (pins and needles) or burning feeling in the hands or feet
- Trouble picking up an object or buttoning your shirt or blouse
- Muscle weakness that causes you to have trouble walking, climbing stairs or brushing your teeth
- Odd sensations such as heat or burning when touching something cold
- Constipation or bloating
- Dizziness or blurred vision

Peripheral nerve damage may be short-lived but it may take a few months or even years before it goes away. Sometimes, peripheral nerve damage may not go away.

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## What can I do to manage my peripheral neuropathy?

### 1. Take medication as prescribed

Medications may help ease pain.

Your doctor may prescribe these medicines to relieve nerve pain or discomfort:

- Gabapentin (Neurontin)
- Amitriptyline (Elavil)
- Pregabalin (Lyrica)

# How to Manage Your Peripheral Neuropathy

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## 2. Ask your doctor about medical options

There are medical options which may help to strengthen your muscles and improve coordination and balance.

- Physiotherapy can help with exercise programs and assistive tools
- Occupational therapists can help you with footwear ideas and finding useful tools to help with activities
- Podiatrists can help care for your feet

## 3. Complementary Therapies

Some patients find that complementary therapies help manage peripheral neuropathy.

These therapies include:

- Acupuncture
- Massage therapy
- Relaxation exercises
- Meditation

## 4. Take care of your body

If you have peripheral neuropathy, you will need to learn ways to cope with the symptoms.

- Take care of your feet → wear loose cotton socks and protective shoes with good support. Check your skin daily to look for any cuts or bruises
- Massage your feet and hands → this may help ease stiffness (be careful to wash off slippery oils or lotions)
- Take care of your nerves → limit alcohol or any other drugs that might make you unsteady
- Use helpful tools → special pens, pencils, knives and forks can be easier to hold. Special tools (e.g. zipper pulls, buttoners and stretchy shoe laces) can help you get dressed

## 5. Be safe

Safety is important for people with peripheral neuropathy due to the lack of feeling, lessened strength or muscle control. You may be at risk for falls.

# How to Manage Your Peripheral Neuropathy

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Follow these helpful safety tips for your home:

- Have well-lit spaces, such as having a night light to light the way to the bathroom
- Make sure there are handrails on both sides of all stairways
- In the bathroom use non-skid strips or mats in the tub or shower
- Clean up any spills right away so you don't slip
- Avoid sudden movements and take time when getting up from sitting
- Don't walk in bare feet
- Check the temperature of the water with a part of your body that has normal sensation to avoid scalding yourself
- Use rubber gloves when washing dishes
- In the kitchen use lightweight and non-breakable glass, knives, forks and plates

***If you drive, talk with your health care team. You may have trouble lifting your foot from the gas pedal to the brake when you are driving.***

*The information presented was gathered from CCS and BC Cancer Agency.*

# How to Manage Your Sexuality Changes

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## What are cancer-related sexuality changes?

Cancer treatments can cause physical symptoms and side effects that can change your comfort, interest, desire and ability to be intimate or engage in sexual activity. Side effects from treatment may include nausea, changes in bowel function, sleep, fatigue and nerve damage. These things can affect your sexual desire, genital arousal (vaginal lubrication and erection) or your ability or interest to reach orgasm.

Changes to how you look:

- Cancer treatments may also change your body's appearance. Changes such as loss of hair, skin changes, alterations in your weight or scars from surgery
- Sometimes these changes can affect what you think and how you feel about your body
- Your body image is very important and can affect your desire for intimacy

Coping with emotions:

- Emotional distress, anxiety and depression, and the medications used to treat these conditions, can also affect sexuality and the desire for intimacy
  - Emotions not only impact you mentally, but can also affect your sexual response
  - Emotions can also affect your relationship with your partner
  - For example if you are worried about your future, money or taking part in family life, you may have a lessened desire for intimacy
- .....

## What can I do to manage my sexuality changes?

### 1. Talk with your partner

Open, honest communication between you and your partner is an important step to getting started with sex again. Share your feelings with each other – this is often the first step to finding problems and helpful solutions. You both need to talk about your feelings and listen to each other.

When talking about sex or sexuality:

- Talk about your fears or worries rather than trying to hide or avoid them
- If you have pain or tenderness, tell your partner

# How to Manage Your Sexuality Changes

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- Let your partner know if you don't feel like having sex and why you feel this way
- Let each other know when you're interested in sex or other ways of showing affection
- Go slowly at first. Start with lots of closeness, hugging and other things that you feel comfortable with. These physical displays of affection can help you and your partner become physically close without having sex
- Be patient. It may take time for you to become aroused

## 2. Talk to your healthcare team about sexual changes

Support from your healthcare team can help you understand the changes that are happening in your body. Don't be embarrassed to ask your healthcare team if and when it's safe to have sex or if you need to take any safety measures.

Sexual changes for women:

- Vaginal dryness → is when the vagina doesn't make the normal amount of moisture or lubrication
- Vaginal stenosis → is when the vagina becomes narrower and shorter

Sexual changes for men:

- Painful ejaculation → certain treatments can lead to pain during ejaculation
- Erectile dysfunction (ED) → is when you are unable to get and keep an erection firm enough to have sex

## 3. Talk to your healthcare team about treatment options

Once the type and cause of the sexual problem is known, your healthcare team can suggest ways to manage it.

Treatment options for women:

- Try different positions. Deep pelvis thrusts may be painful for women with vaginal stenosis. Try exploring other positions that may be more comfortable.
- Use lubricants. For vaginal dryness use water soluble lubricants like K-Y Jelly, Repagyn, Astroglide or Replens. Do NOT use Vaseline or other oil based lubricants as they irritate the vagina

# How to Manage Your Sexuality Changes

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- Vaginal dilators may be used to stretch vaginal tissues and to prevent the vagina from shrinking. When the dilator is in place, it feels much like a large tampon

Treatment options for men:

- Physiotherapy may be able to help with painful orgasms. They can teach you exercises that stretch the pelvic floor muscles and return their tone to normal
- Prescription medications are available to treat erectile dysfunction. Each medicine has side effects and should be used as directed

## 4. Become informed

- During seven days after each chemotherapy treatment, men should wear a condom when having intercourse. This will protect your partner from exposure to chemotherapy from bodily fluids.
- For both men and women of childbearing age, it is important to avoid pregnancy while on chemotherapy. Cancer treatments may have negative effects on a developing fetus.
- Cancer is not contagious. You can't get cancer from kissing, touching or having sex with someone with cancer
- Having sex does not cause cancer to grow faster and it does not increase the chance of cancer coming back

*The information presented was gathered from CCS, BC Cancer Agency, and ChemoCare.*

# How to Manage Your Fertility Concerns

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## What are cancer-related fertility problems?

Some cancers or their treatments affect the reproductive system, which can lead to fertility problems. If the reproductive system is damaged, it can affect a man's ability to father children or a woman's ability to become pregnant.

The types of fertility problems that can develop, and whether or not they are short term or permanent, depend on:

- Your age
- The type of cancer
- The type or dose of treatment
- The length of time since treatment

What causes fertility problems?

- Surgery
- Radiation therapy
- Chemotherapy
- Hormonal therapy

What do I need to know about pregnancy and cancer?

- For men and women of childbearing age, it is possible to conceive a child during treatment
  - Prevention of pregnancy is very important due to the risk of birth defects, stillbirths, miscarriages or spontaneous abortions as a result of treatment
  - Chemotherapy can damage the developing fetus. It is suggested to use two methods of contraception for at least one year after the last chemotherapy treatment
- .....

## What can I do to preserve fertility?

### 1. Talk to your healthcare team

Talk to your doctor about the effects cancer treatment can have on your ability to have children, as well as your fertility and parenthood options. Fertility counselling should be done before treatment starts.

# How to Manage Your Fertility Concerns

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Counselling includes talking about:

- All the options
- Which options may be best for you
- Possible future outcomes
- Costs of different options

## **2. Discuss what precautions can be taken**

Radiation shielding:

- When possible, the testicles in men and ovaries in women will be protected
- Whether this can be done or not depends on the type and location on the cancer

Sperm banking:

- May be an option for some men who wish to father children in the future
- Sperm is collected and frozen before treatment starts
- Sperm is stored for future use in fertilization procedures known as artificial insemination

Banking or freezing eggs:

- Also called oocyte banking or cryopreservation
- Some of a woman's eggs are removed from her ovaries and frozen
- The eggs are later thawed and then fertilized with a man's sperm

Embryo freezing:

- The woman's eggs are collected during a surgical procedure and then fertilized with the man's sperm
- The fertilized eggs are then frozen and stored
- The stored eggs may be implanted in the woman's uterus at a later date

# How to Manage Your Fertility Concerns

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## 3. Discuss other parenthood options

Adoption:

- Having cancer doesn't rule out the possibility of adoption
- Some agencies may say that you must wait for a certain amount of time after treatment before you can adopt a child

Surrogacy:

- Surrogacy is a woman who carries and bears a child for someone else
- Some women may think about using a surrogate if their uterus is removed because of cancer and they can't have children themselves

Using donor sperm or eggs:

- Some couples choose to use donor sperm or eggs in artificial insemination
- The egg donor may be known or unknown to the couple
- Sperm donors are mostly anonymous and only frozen sperm are used

## 4. Locate nearby fertility clinics

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| • ONE Fertility Burlington<br>3210 Harvester Road<br>Burlington, ON L7N 3T1<br>905-634-4440 | • HART Fertility Centre<br>1057 Main Street West - Suite 102<br>Hamilton, ON L8S 1B7<br>905-972-8382 |
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*The information presented was gathered from CCS and ChemoCare.*

# How to Manage Your Sensitivity to the Sun

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## What is chemotherapy-related photosensitivity?

Some chemotherapy drugs may make the skin more sensitive to sunlight. This is called photosensitivity. It looks much like sunburn and can occur after being in the sun for a very short amount of time. Photosensitivity can continue for a few months after treatment is finished so sun protection is important during this time. Some chemotherapy medications that cause your skin to be more sensitive include: fluorouracil, dacarbazine (DTIC), methotrexate and vinblastine.

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## What can I do to help protect my skin from the sun?

### 1. Become sun aware

Learning more about the sun can allow you to still enjoy the outdoors while decreasing your risk of sunburn.

Here are some tips:

- Try not to go out in the sun from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. since this is when the sun's rays are the strongest
- Before going outside, check the weather forecast for the daily UV Index. On days when the UV Index reaches 3 or more, you need to be extra careful to protect your skin
- If your shadow is shorter than you, it's time to find some shade
- Choose to sit under a tree at the park or under an awning on a restaurant patio

### 2. Protect yourself from the sun

Wearing the appropriate sunscreen and protective gear is very important to prevent sunburns.

These tips can help you protect your skin from the sun:

- Use sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30
- Make sure the sunscreen is labelled broad-spectrum (offers both UVA and UVB protection)
- Apply 30 minutes to 1 hour before going out in the sun and reapply as per product label
- When outside, cover up with a long-sleeved shirt, long pants or skirt and a broad-brimmed hat
- Wear sunglasses that are close-fitting with UVA and UVB protection
- Don't use indoor tanning beds or sun lamps

# Chemotherapy safety at home

Chemotherapy (chemo) is using drugs to kill or stop cancer cells from growing. Chemo can also damage normal cells. We get rid of chemo mainly through urine, stool, vomit, semen and vaginal fluid for up to 7 days after the last chemotherapy dose. The actual risk of harm is quite low, but there are safety measures that you need to take.

This handout describes tips to safely handle body waste after chemotherapy at home. By following these tips, you can lessen the chance of exposing yourself and others to these drugs.

- If there is chance of coming into contact with items contaminated with chemo, you, your caregiver or your home care provider must wear gloves.
- If during treatment you call EMS (911) or a transport service, visit your dentist or another health care provider (eg. Emergency Department), tell them that you are on chemotherapy treatment.

How do I clean up body wastes?

- Clean up as soon as you can. Keep pets and those not helping with the clean-up away from the area.
  - Always wear 2 pairs of disposable gloves to change adult briefs or pads and when handling soiled items. You can buy disposable gloves at your local drug store.
  - Put body wastes from soiled items into the toilet. Close the lid and flush the toilet 2 times.
  - Wear 2 pairs of gloves when emptying bedpans or containers. Avoid splashing while emptying into the toilet. Rinse bedpans or containers well with detergent and water. Put rinse water in the toilet. Close the lid and flush the toilet 2 times.
- .....

## **How do I clean up body wastes?**

- Use paper towels, disposable cloths or toilet paper to wipe up any spilled waste. Clean the area very well with a household cleaner and rinse
- Double bag disposable items, adult briefs or pads, and cleanup supplies. Be sure to store garbage in a safe place, away from children and pets. Dispose in regular garbage
- Wash your hands with soap and water after removing gloves

# Chemotherapy safety at home

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How do I wash articles soiled with body fluids?

- Wash articles soiled with body fluids separately in your washing machine twice, in hot water with regular detergent. If not soiled with body fluids, they may be washed with regular laundry

Is it safe to have sex while on chemo?

- Yes it is.
- There may be traces of chemo in vaginal fluid and semen for up to 7 days after treatment. The use of condoms is recommended to protect your partner. Please talk to your doctor or nurse about your concerns.

Other safety tips

- Always wash your hand before eating and drinking
- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should avoid handling body fluids or waste.

***Being with loved ones is an important part of life.***

***Eating together, enjoying favourite activities, hugging and kissing are all safe.***

# **Information for patients and families**

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## **What if it's an emergency?**

- Call 911
- Tell them you are receiving Chemotherapy, when you had your last dose and if you are on chemotherapy at home

The ambulance will bring you to the closest Emergency room.

## **What should I bring to the Emergency room?**

- Bring your medications
- Bring your Patient and Family Education Booklet

## **What do I do when I get to the Emergency room?**

- Register as soon as you get there
- Tell them you are an oncology patient on chemotherapy
- If you have a fever present your Fever Card
- If your condition changes while you are waiting, let them know

## **What happens next?**

- The emergency doctor will see you
- They will consult the oncology department if needed
- Your electronic record is available to the Emergency room doctors

## **Suppliers of Post Breast Surgery and Mastectomy Products**

We encourage you to call the business first to enquire about selection and if an appointment is needed. Most places have forms for government assistance and will help you complete them.

### **BURLINGTON**

#### **BodyMed Boutique**

2033 Mt Forest Dr  
Burlington, ON L7P 1H4  
289-337-1508  
[bodymedboutique.ca](http://bodymedboutique.ca)

#### **Best Alternative**

2144 Maplewood Dr  
Burlington, ON L7R 2C5  
905-333-9626

## **Look Good...Feel Better**

[www.lgfb.ca](http://www.lgfb.ca)

This is a free, non-medical, brand-neutral, national public service program created to help individuals with cancer look good, improve their self-esteem, and manage their treatment and recovery with greater confidence. The program is endorsed by the Canadian Cancer Society and sponsored by the member companies of the Canadian Cosmetic Toiletry and fragrance Association (CCTFA). For further information or to register for the 2 hour workshop, contact:

Wellspring Oakville  
2545 Sixth Line  
Oakville, ON L6H 7V9  
905-257-1928  
[www.wellspring.ca/oakville](http://www.wellspring.ca/oakville)

## **Wigs and Hairpieces**

Canadian Cancer Society  
Halton Community Office  
940 Sheldon Court  
Burlington, ON L7L 5K6  
905-634-689  
[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)  
(used wigs available free of charge,  
selection  
will vary)

### **BURLINGTON**

#### **Hair Forum**

Burlington Centre  
905-634-0740

#### **Medical Image Wigs**

760 Pacific Rd #28  
Oakville, ON L6L 6M5  
905-338-2688

#### **K-LABA Hair & Beauty Supplies**

746 Guelph Line  
Burlington, ON L7R 3N5  
905-681-9368

Please check your personal health insurance information for wig coverage and ask your nurse for a "wig form".

The Joseph Brant Oncology Clinic does not endorse or recommend any particular organization, individual, product, or service, nor can we assure the quality of the work of any organization or individual.

Please note: This list is not all inclusive.



## Notes



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[www.josephbranthospital.ca](http://www.josephbranthospital.ca)

