



# Tips to manage common side effects of cancer treatments

When a cancer treatment affects your healthy tissues or organs, it can cause side effects. Talk to your doctor about any side effects you have and use the tips below to help manage them.



## Infections

Some cancer treatments can raise your chance of getting infections because they lower the number of white blood cells, which help your body fight infection. Your doctor will do blood tests to check your number of white blood cells. If you have a very low number of white blood cells, it is called neutropenia.

### Tips to prevent infections

- **Wash your hands often** with soap and warm water
- **Stay away from people who are sick**
- **Avoid crowds** and large groups of people
- **Cook meat, fish, and eggs to the proper temperature and wash or peel fruits and vegetables**



**Call your doctor if you have any of these signs of an infection:**

- A fever of 100.4° F or higher
- Chills and sweats
- Trouble breathing
- Redness, swelling, and pain anywhere on your body



## Pain

Pain can cause your body to take longer to heal, lead to poor sleep, and affect your mood.

### Tips to manage pain

- **Talk with your doctor about your pain** – they can prescribe medicine and help you find other ways to relieve your pain
- **Try warm baths or warm washcloths on painful areas** – if this doesn't help, try ice wrapped in a towel or cool packs
- **Use a relaxation method**, such as deep breathing
- **Do activities you enjoy** to distract yourself



## Fatigue (feeling weak and tired)

You may feel very tired, weak, and low on energy. Other side effects of cancer treatment, such as anemia (not having enough red blood cells) or pain, can also cause fatigue.

### Tips to manage fatigue

- **Decide which activities are important to you** and do them when you have the most energy. Then, make time to rest.
- **Eat foods that are high in protein and calories** to give you energy and keep up your strength



## Feeling sick to your stomach (nausea) and throwing up

Nausea and throwing up can cause more serious problems, such as dehydration (not having enough fluid in your body).

### Tips to manage nausea and throwing up

- **Ask your doctor about anti-nausea medicines.** You may have to try different medicines to find one that works well for you.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.** Try sipping on water, ginger ale, tea, or sports drinks throughout the day.
- **Avoid greasy, fried, or spicy foods**
- **Try eating a small snack before treatment.** After treatment, wait at least 1 hour before you eat or drink.



## Mouth problems and changes in taste

Some cancer treatments can cause a dry mouth, sores, or problems with your teeth. Others may cause changes in the way foods taste.

### Tips to manage mouth problems and changes in taste

- **Rinse your mouth** with a mixture of warm water, baking soda, and salt
- **Gently brush your teeth, gums, and tongue** after each meal and before bed
- **Suck on ice chips or sugar-free hard candy** to help with a dry mouth
- **Try different foods to find ones you like** if you have changes in taste



## Hair loss

Some cancer treatments may cause your hair to fall out. This can be hard to cope with. Your hair will start to grow back a few weeks after treatment ends.

### Tips to cope with hair loss

- **Consider cutting your hair** before it starts falling out
- **Ask your health insurance company if they cover the cost of a wig**, if you choose to wear one
- **Get involved in a free “Look Good... Feel Better” program**, which teaches female cancer patients beauty tips.

To learn more, visit: [www.lookgoodfeelbetter.org](http://www.lookgoodfeelbetter.org)

To schedule a visit at Robert E. Hardy Cancer Center, call 615-341-4383