

Every person's experience with cancer treatment is unique. Knowing what side effects to expect can help you prepare for them. Being well informed can help you and your health care team to create a plan to manage or even prevent some side effects of cancer treatment. This is important so that you can have the best possible quality of life during treatment and also be able to complete treatment in a timely manner. It is also important to talk with your health care team about what kinds of side effects may be hardest for you to manage since there may be a variety of treatment options available.



[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org)  
1-888-793-9355



## FATIGUE

Fatigue is one of the most common side effects of cancer treatment. Treatment-related fatigue can leave you feeling too tired to do the things you need or want to do. Fatigue can leave you physically, emotionally, or mentally exhausted. You may have trouble finding the energy for even the simplest tasks. This type of tiredness is generally not connected to your amount of physical activity or sleep.

For many cancer patients, fatigue is one of the most frustrating side effects that interfere with their day-to-day activities. You may only experience a small amount of fatigue after your first treatment, but the amount of fatigue will likely grow as your treatment continues. Fatigue tends to improve after treatment has finished. However, it does take some time to feel like you did before your treatment.

### Here are some tips to help you cope with fatigue:

- ✓ Organize your activities around the times of day where you have the most energy.
- ✓ Eat healthy foods, avoiding greasy and fried foods. For some healthy recipes, visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/recipe-gallery-cancer-survivors](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/recipe-gallery-cancer-survivors)
- ✓ Take time to nap and rest. Know that this is an important part of your recovery. Try not to feel guilty during rest days.
- ✓ Drink at least 8 glasses of water or fluid a day, unless instructed otherwise by your doctor, and avoid alcohol.
- ✓ Ask others for help.
- ✓ Get some physical activity each day, even if it is just a 10 minute walk.

For more tips on how to cope with fatigue, visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/fatigue](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/fatigue).

## NAUSEA AND VOMITING

Some cancer treatments can cause nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) and vomiting. There are many medications that can help or prevent this. Some medications are given right before or along with your cancer treatment. Be sure to talk with your nurse or doctor if you are having nausea and/or vomiting. Find some tips for managing nausea and vomiting at [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/nausea-vomiting](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/nausea-vomiting).

## CHANGES IN BOWEL HABITS

Medications, surgery, inactivity, and dietary changes are just a few of the things that can change your normal bowel habits. You may have diarrhea (frequent loose bowel movements) or be constipated (feeling like you have to move your bowels but not being able to). For diarrhea, be sure to drink plenty of water, and avoid caffeine and very hot or very cold drinks. Eat several smaller, low fiber meals throughout the day. To manage constipation, drink lots of fluids, try to get some physical activity every day, and talk to your doctor about adding a fiber supplement or other medications to prevent constipation. For more tips to help you cope with diarrhea and constipation, visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/constipation-diarrhea](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/constipation-diarrhea).

## INFECTIONS

Infection can be a serious side effect of cancer treatment. Cancer treatment can cause a drop in your white blood cells which help your body fight off infection. Some signs of infection include a fever, chills, redness or swelling around a wound or catheter, mouth sores, unusual vaginal discharge, cloudy urine, sore throat, or cough.

### Tips To Prevent Infection:

- ✓ Wash your hands before cooking, eating and after using the bathroom, sneezing, or coughing. When washing your hands scrub with a gentle soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds.
- ✓ Avoid crowds and people who are sick or who have just received a vaccine for chicken pox or polio.
- ✓ Gently but thoroughly brush your teeth after meals.
- ✓ Avoid cuts. If you do cut yourself, clean the cut well and apply an antiseptic.
- ✓ Wash fruits and vegetables well before eating and avoid raw meat, chicken, eggs and seafood.

For more information about how to prevent infections, visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/anemia-infection-bleeding](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/anemia-infection-bleeding).

### Call Your Healthcare Team Immediately If You Experience the Following Symptoms

- A fever of 100.5° F or higher, since a fever is often one of the first symptoms of infection
- Redness, swelling, rash or skin that is warm to touch, especially around a wound or catheter site
- Cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, chest pain
- Mouth ulcers
- Sinus pain or earache
- Diarrhea or pain when you have a bowel movement
- Bloody or cloudy urine; pain or a burning sensation during urination; frequent urination
- Unusual vaginal discharge or itching

## MOUTH AND THROAT CHANGES

Ask your healthcare team if you should expect this side effect. It is important to manage mouth and throat changes so that you can maintain a nutritious diet during and after cancer treatment. Some changes you may experience include:

### Mouth Sores

Inspect your mouth and tongue every day for mouth sores, red areas, or white patches. White patches may indicate infection. Avoid sharp, crunchy, spicy or citrus foods, alcoholic beverages, and tobacco when your mouth is sore. Ice chips or popsicles may reduce pain. Contact your healthcare team if you feel pain medications are necessary.

### Dry Mouth

Drink plenty of fluids or suck on sugar-free candies to keep your mouth moist. Avoid mouthwashes containing alcohol. Eat cool or room temperature foods and foods that are soft and easy to swallow like mashed potatoes, cooked cereals, soft-boiled or scrambled eggs, yogurt, and puddings. Ask your healthcare team about saliva substitutes if your mouth is very dry.

### Changes in Taste

Cancer treatment can make food taste like metal or chalk, have no taste at all, or just taste different. Try eating with plastic utensils and cooking with glass pots.

For more ideas on how to cope with changes in your mouth and throat, visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/mouth-throat-changes](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/mouth-throat-changes).

## MEMORY CHANGES

Approximately one in five people who undergo chemotherapy will experience what many survivors refer to as “chemobrain.” Long-term (and short-term) symptoms like forgetfulness, confusion, lack of concentration, difficulty finding the right words, and difficulty multitasking have all been described by cancer survivors. The cause of this is unknown, but it is a very real side effect. Many find it helpful to make lists, record important dates and information on a calendar, and eliminate distractions when they have a task to accomplish. To learn more about changes in memory, visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/cognitive-changes](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/cognitive-changes).

## OTHER SIDE EFFECTS

**Less common but still possible side effects include:**

- changes in your skin and nails
- bleeding
- nerve damage
- pain
- loss of fertility and sexual problems
- hair loss

Not everyone will experience all of these side effects, but it is important to discuss any side effects or concerns you are having with your doctor. For more information about other side effects visit: [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/cancer-treatment-side-effects](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/cancer-treatment-side-effects).

# General Cancer Information, Survivorship & Support

**Cancer Support Community** • 888-793-9355 • [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org)

**American Cancer Society** • 800-227-2345 • [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

**CancerCare** • 800-813-4673 • [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)

**Cancer.net** • 888-651-3038 • [www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net)

**Caregiver Action Network** • 855-227-3640 • [www.caregiveraction.org](http://www.caregiveraction.org)

**Healthcare.gov** • [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov)

**Livestrong Foundation** • 866-673-7205 • [www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)

**National Cancer Institute** • 800-422-6237 • [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

**National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine** • 888-644-6226 • [www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)

**Patient Advocate Foundation** • 800-532-5274 • [www.patientadvocate.org](http://www.patientadvocate.org)

## CANCER SUPPORT COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The Cancer Support Community's (CSC) resources and programs are available free of charge. Call 888-793-9355 or visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org) for more info.

**Cancer Support Helpline**<sup>®</sup>—Have questions, concerns or looking for resources? Call CSC's toll-free Cancer Support Helpline (888-793-9355), available in 200 languages Mon–Fri, 9 am–9 pm ET.

**Open to Options**<sup>®</sup>—Preparing for your next appointment? Our trained specialists can help you create a list of questions to share with your doctor. Make an appointment by calling 888-793-9355 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda's Club.

**Frankly Speaking About Cancer**<sup>®</sup>—Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs.

[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FranklySpeakingAboutCancer](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FranklySpeakingAboutCancer).

**Services at Local CSCs and Gilda's Clubs**—With the help of 170 locations, CSC and Gilda's Club affiliates provide services free of charge to people touched by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more at a location near you. [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation).

**MyLifeLine**—CSC's private, online community allows patients and caregivers to easily connect with friends and family to receive social, emotional, and practical support throughout the cancer journey and beyond. Connect with other caregivers by joining the Caregiver Support online discussion board. Sign up at [www.MyLifeLine.org](http://www.MyLifeLine.org).

**Grassroots Network**—Make sure your voice is heard by federal and state policy makers on issues affecting cancer patients and survivors by joining our Network at [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/become-advocate](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/become-advocate).

**Cancer Experience Registry**<sup>®</sup>—Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at [www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org](http://www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org).

The Cancer Support Community provides this information as a service. This publication is not intended to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor. We strongly suggest consulting your doctor or other health care professionals to answer questions and learn more.

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