

# Chemotherapy Basics

Always consult with your naturopathic doctor to ensure that all herbs, vitamins, and other supplements you are taking are safe with your current conventional treatment plan.



**CCNM**  
Canadian College of  
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- Drink plenty of WATER, especially on days of chemotherapy. This is the most important protection for your kidneys to help flush out the drug(s). Aim for about 2 liters per day.
- Continue to choose healthy, whole food options. The hospital will likely tell you that you can eat anything, however remember cancer-fighting foods for your cancer-type and consider this as part of your therapy. Include these foods in your diet daily as much as possible.
- Meditation and visualizations have been shown to increase the efficacy of treatments; find one that resonates with you. Search “guided meditation for chemotherapy” on the internet for ideas.

## Fatigue

- Consider ENERGY CONSERVATION. Your energy is needed to detoxify chemotherapy drugs and to clear away dead cancer cells so pace your energy throughout your day to avoid a crash. Take regularly scheduled breaks, even if you think you don't need them.
- Consider napping during the day to help spread out your energy and ability. Naps should be under an hour long and finish before 4:00 pm to avoid interfering with your sleep at night.
- Epsom salt baths can be helpful in supporting detoxification and recovery after chemotherapy. This is best done on the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> day after the infusion. Add about 2 cups of Epsom salts per bath and remain in the bath for at least 15 minutes.
- Movement is helpful in keeping energy up, including daily walking. Ensure that it takes LESS TIME to recover from the activity than it did to do the activity itself. For example, if a 30-minute walk is followed by an hour couch-binge or nap, that was too much and you should reduce the time or the intensity.
- Time outside, in nature, can have a beneficial effect on energy and your immune system. Plan to spend some time outside each day, however, some chemo drugs can make your skin more sensitive to sun.

## Nausea & Vomiting

- Preventing dehydration is key during times of nausea and vomiting. Drink water with lemon, natural sport or electrolyte mixes, coconut water, etc. Take liquids between meals rather than during meals.
- Try to eat small, frequent meals to avoid an empty stomach, which can worsen nausea.
- Eat foods with little or no aroma. Cold foods will generally have less smell and be better tolerated.
- Ginger helps with nausea. Try homemade ginger ale or tea, ginger pills, or inhaling the essential oil.
- Other essential oils to help with nausea include: sweet orange & peppermint oils. These should be used by inhalation only. Inhale 3-5 deep breaths or place a few drops on a tissue by your pillow while resting.
- Avoid spicy, acidic, and caffeine-containing foods, which can irritate your stomach.
- Avoid greasy, fried and fatty foods as these will make you feel worse.
- Try not to eat or drink anything 2 hours before and 2 hours after treatments, which can worsen nausea.

## Diarrhea

- Avoid foods that contain alcohol or caffeine, foods that are rich, spicy, greasy or fried and high-sugar beverages (e.g. sodas). These may all worsen your symptoms.
- Try eating applesauce, apples or pears. These fruits contain pectin which helps absorb water from the stool to make it more firm.
- Try adding ¼ teaspoon of powdered cinnamon to the above, or a smoothie or even a tea.
- Ensure that you are getting adequate fiber in your diet which helps to prevent loose stools. Eat whole grains or a fiber supplement can also be used.
- Ground flaxseeds help to regulate the bowels and can be used in both diarrhea and constipation. Add 2 tablespoons to a smoothie or dressing, or sprinkle on cereal, salads, applesauce, yogurt, oatmeal, etc.
- Hydration becomes more important when you are experiencing diarrhea, so be sure to rehydrate with fluids that contain electrolytes such as lemon water, electrolyte mixes, and coconut water.

## **Constipation**

- Ensure that your diet contains plenty of fiber by eating whole grains, vegetables, fruits, beans, peas, lentils, flaxseed, oatmeal, etc.
- A fiber supplement or probiotic may also be helpful. Ask your naturopathic doctor about these.
- Movement and hydration are important in order to have a bowel movement. Try to drink around 2 liters per day and get up, move around, go for a walk, etc.
- Try a Brown Cow made by mixing ½ tablespoon of milk of magnesia with ½ cup (500 mL) of prune juice. Increase by ½ tablespoon of milk of magnesia as needed. Best to take before bed in order to have a movement in the morning.
- Herbal teas containing laxative herbs such as Senna or Smooth Move by Traditional Medicinals, etc.

## **Taste Changes**

- Some foods may begin to taste bitter, bland or metallic. Interestingly, red meat is often the first food to taste bad.
- Good oral hygiene can help with taste changes. Use a gentle mouthwash & rinse well before eating.
- Variety is key: try new spices and sauces. Some foods you disliked before may taste good to you now.
- For a metallic taste or dry mouth try eating sour foods like citrus. Try a lemon/lime swish before meals.
- Try using plastic or wooden cutlery instead of metal to prevent a metallic taste.
- Chew natural gum e.g. Pur, Spry, Glee, etc.
- Keeping foods cold may lessen bitter, metallic, or unpleasant after tastes.

## **Building blood**

- Anemia (low hemoglobin) can be caused by the cancer, Iron or B12 deficiency or the chemotherapy.
- Try eating bone broths, leafy green vegetables, 1 tablespoon of blackstrap molasses daily, nettles tea
- Stay well hydrated as water is also required to build blood.
- Vitamin C helps to absorb iron and other minerals. Good sources of iron include: citrus fruits, broccoli, green and red peppers, cabbage, strawberries, peas, tomatoes, cantaloupe, and Brussel sprouts.

## **Hair Loss**

- Hair loss during treatment is typically reversible however it can be very upsetting when it happens.
- Hair may become thinner or it may fall out entirely. It usually falls out in clumps. Any remaining hair may become dull or dry.
- Hair loss can occur gradually or quite quickly. It often begins 2–3 weeks after chemotherapy starts.
- Be gentle with your hair and wash is less frequently.
  - Use mild shampoo and condition about twice a week, massaging the scalp while you wash.
  - Use a soft brush and a hair dryer set on low or let your hair dry naturally. Do not rub the scalp.
  - Avoid curling irons, straightening irons and hot rollers. Avoid perms, hair colour, bleach, peroxide, ammonia and lacquer during treatment. These products can contain chemicals that can irritate the scalp and damage the hair.
  - Wear a soft cloth cap at night to catch hairs as they fall out. Use a satin pillow case as it is softer and smoother than other materials.
- Protect your scalp when you go outside. Wear a wide-brimmed hat or scarf, or use sunscreen on your scalp. Wear sunglasses to protect your eyelashes.
- Brush and wash away hair that is falling out. Gently wash loose hair from arms, underarms and pubic areas. Men should also wash hair from the chest and face.
- There are cooling caps to help reduce chemotherapy-induced hair loss, that work by constricting superficial blood vessels in the scalp to reduce the flow of chemotherapy to the area.
  - These have been studied and shown to reduce the amount of hair that is lost during chemotherapy treatment and to be safe. Note that these caps are only for infusion chemotherapy treatments. Examples include Cold Comfort, DigniCap & Penguin Cold Caps.

**Please check in with us if you are experiencing any of these or other side effects so that we can support you as much as possible during your chemotherapy**