



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

COPING WITH CHALLENGING SIDE EFFECTS OF BREAST CANCER TREATMENT

There are many treatment options for people who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. It's important to tell your health care team about any side effects you experience so that they can be managed. With your health care team's guidance, it is possible to maximize your quality of life while being treated for breast cancer.



HERE ARE SOME COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF TREATMENT FOR BREAST CANCER, ALONG WITH WAYS TO COPE WITH THEM:

Nausea and vomiting

These symptoms may be caused by chemotherapy. Your health care team can prescribe medications to help manage these side effects. Your team may also recommend working with a dietitian, who can provide tips on eating and how to stay hydrated during chemotherapy.

Chemobrain

Problems with memory, attention and concentration are sometimes referred to by patients as “chemobrain.” Talk with your doctor if you notice any symptoms of chemobrain—he or she can recommend treatments. Tips for what you can do on your own to cope with chemobrain can be found on CancerCare's fact sheet, “Combating Chemobrain: Tips for Keeping Your Memory Sharp.”

Bone loss

Some hormonal therapies and chemotherapies may cause bone loss, increasing the risk of bone fractures. Talk with your doctor about prescription and over-the-counter medications that may help optimize your bone health and exercises that strengthen your muscles.

Fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of extreme tiredness. Your doctor can treat fatigue with prescription medications. Exercise may also help you cope with fatigue.

Lymphedema

Lymphedema is a painful swelling, usually in an arm or leg, that happens when the body's lymphatic fluid fails to circulate properly and builds up in soft tissue. Your doctor or nurse can give you tips to prevent and reduce the swelling. Some treatments for lymphedema include wearing a specially fitted compression sleeve that helps drain the fluid. Your health care team may also refer you to a program of special exercises that are taught by a trained physical therapist and are known to help reduce this side effect.

Peripheral neuropathy

Peripheral neuropathy, or a tingling sensation in your hands and feet, may be the side effect of certain cancer treatments. This side effect may also be painful. Talk with your doctor about seeing a neurologist, a specialist in peripheral neuropathy and pain management. There are a number of medications to provide relief from neuropathy.

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Risk of infection

Being proactive with your health care team in developing an infection control plan is very important. Your doctor can prescribe medications to reduce your risk of infection and enhance your quality of life during chemotherapy.

Pain

There are many medications for pain. Controlling pain may require different approaches, so it is important to be as detailed as possible when describing pain to your doctor.



KEEPING A JOURNAL

Work with your health care team to make a list of all of your medications, chemotherapy and targeted treatments, including their dosage and the frequency in which they are taken. To keep track of side effects, you may find it helpful to create a daily journal that details information such as:

- When the side effect occurred and for how long it lasted
- How strong the discomfort/pain was on a scale of 1-10
- How the side effect impacts your daily activities
- Contact information for each member of your health care team
- When to call your doctor and/or go to the emergency room with a symptom
- Any other questions or concerns that you have

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercares.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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