

COPING WITH SIDE EFFECTS OF CHRONIC MYELOGENOUS LEUKEMIA (CML)

People coping with chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML) are living longer than ever before because of treatment advances made in the last decade. Most CML patients are treated using targeted therapies called tyrosine kinase inhibitors. These drugs include imatinib (Gleevec), dasatinib (Sprycel), nilotinib (Tasigna) and omacetaxine mepesuccinate (Synribo). Many patients are able to manage their CML and go on with their normal lives for many years while taking a pill once or twice a day.



As with all drugs, tyrosine kinase inhibitors have the potential for side effects. It can be especially challenging for CML patients to cope with side effects, as they may be required to take a pill every day, perhaps twice a day, for an indefinite period of time. And when you have to take a medication for a long period of time, even “minor” side effects that are tolerable at first may become a problem if patients feel they have no relief within sight.

By talking to members of your health care team about any side effects that you are experiencing, your team can work with you to help you cope with them. There are also things you can do on your own to manage side effects.

Some common side effects people coping with CML may experience include mild nausea or loss of appetite. Some patients may also experience chronic diarrhea, muscle aches, muscle spasms and headaches as a result of their treatment. Keep in mind that side effects can vary from person to person, and all of these side effects can be treated by your health care team.

Skin rashes may also occur as a result of medication for CML. It may appear early on within the first two weeks of starting a drug. By and large, rash is a common and manageable side

effect, and generally goes away. But if you are concerned, talk to your doctor about options to treat the skin rash and to make sure it’s nothing more serious.

Fatigue is another common side effect among CML patients. Being active and staying well-hydrated can improve symptoms of fatigue. Patients may want to talk to their doctor about low-impact activities such as yoga or walking to help them stay as active and healthy as possible. If your fatigue is related to anemia and a low red blood cell count, your doctor may prescribe drugs to improve the anemia or reduce the dose of your medication.

Reach out to experts for help in managing side effects. Let your doctors and nurses know how side effects are affecting your quality of life. Your doctor can prescribe medications to help relieve many CML treatment-related side effects. He or she may also ask you questions about your diet and daily activities that may be contributing to any worsening or improving of symptoms.

FINDING A SUPPORT NETWORK

Building a support network will help you better cope with a cancer diagnosis. Your support network should not only include members of your health care team, but also friends and family.

You may also consider talking with an oncology social worker at CancerCare to discuss the challenges of coping with treatment side effects. CancerCare provides individual counseling and support groups available face to face, online and over the telephone. Participating in a support group connects you with others in a similar situation who can provide emotional support, coping strategies and the feeling that you're not alone.



CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare's professional oncology social workers are available to work with you one-on-one to develop strategies for coping with the emotional or practical challenges of cancer. CancerCare also provides support groups, education, financial assistance and referrals to other resources. To learn more about how we help, call us at **800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit www.cancercare.org.

This fact sheet has been made possible by a grant from Teva Pharmaceuticals.



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