

Treating Common GI Side Effects of Cancer and Cancer Treatment

Chemotherapy may affect your ability to digest, absorb and utilize food. The side effects of chemotherapy vary from patient to patient and most side effects go away when treatment ends. Here are some suggestions to help lessen the side effects.

Nausea

- Eat four to six small meals throughout the day instead of two or three large meals
- Try bland foods like rice, noodles, white toast, crackers, pretzels, ice pops, sherbet, cream of wheat®, oatmeal and broth
- Drink fluids between meals; limit beverages with meals
- Avoid foods with strong odors; cold foods may be better tolerated as they usually do not have strong odors
- Avoid greasy, fatty and fried foods

Vomiting

- Do not drink anything until you have the vomiting under control
- Try small amounts of clear liquids such as apple and cranberry juice, flat ginger ale, water or broth
- When you are able to keep down clear liquids, try a full liquid diet or soft diet
 - Examples of full liquids = Cream of Wheat®, pudding, ice cream and milk
 - Examples of soft foods = noodles, eggs, rice and mashed potatoes

Change in the Taste of Food

- Choose tart foods like oranges or lemonade
- Add flavorful seasonings to foods such as garlic, onion, lemon or lime juice, basil, oregano, and rosemary
- If foods taste metallic, use plastic utensils and dishes whenever possible
- Try marinating meats, chicken, or fish in fruit juices, sweet and sour sauce, soy sauce, sweet wine, or Italian dressing

Sore Mouth or Throat

- Avoid acidic, spicy, rough and salty foods
- Choose bland, soft foods that are easy to swallow like milkshakes, bananas, applesauce, yogurt, cottage cheese, mashed potatoes, noodles, macaroni and cheese, puddings, scrambled eggs, and cooked cereals
- Cook vegetables until they are soft and tender
- Mix food with broth, gravies or sauces to make them easier to swallow

Diarrhea

- Avoid greasy fatty and fried foods
- Avoid high fiber foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals
- Avoid dairy products if lactose intolerance is the cause of the diarrhea
- Increase beverage intake to replace lost fluid
- Consider electrolyte solutions, orange juice and broths to replace lost sodium and potassium
- Eat four to six small meals throughout the day instead of two or three large meals
- Limit foods and drinks that contain caffeine such as coffee, tea, soda, and chocolate

Constipation

- Gradually increase fiber in your diet; eat high fiber foods such as fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, nuts, seeds and popcorn
- Drink at least eight glasses of fluid daily, as tolerated
- Try drinking four to eight ounces of prune juice once or twice a day
- Incorporate an exercise routine; talk to your doctor about the amount and type of exercise that is right for you

Loss of Appetite

- Eat small, frequent meals
- Snack on foods such as cheese and crackers, muffins, peanut butter on toast, nuts, fruit, ice cream, pudding, yogurt, cereal with whole milk or buttered popcorn
- Drink non-carbonated beverages between meals to prevent early fullness at meals
- Eat larger meals when you feel well
- Drink liquid nutritional supplements; ask your dietitian for recommendations

Weight Loss

- Add jams or jelly, butter or margarine, mayonnaise, salad dressing and gravy to your foods to increase calories
- Eat high calorie snacks between meals
- Use broth rather than water for cooking noodles and rice
- Include high calorie foods in your diet such as whole milk, ice cream, milkshakes or nutritional supplements

If you are in need of immediate assistance, please call 732-235-2465 and select the option that best meets your needs.