

Chemotherapy and Nutrition

Chemotherapy for cancer has side effects that can affect your eating habits. The side effects depend on many things, including what type of drugs you are taking, how much you are taking, and whether you are taking therapy orally or intravenously (IV). If you are receiving other therapy at the same time, such as radiation, your side effects sometimes are worse.

Side effects

It is common to have a loss of appetite, changes in taste and smell of foods, mouth tenderness or mouth sores, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea or constipation, weight loss, and fatigue. These side effects sometimes are limited to during or immediately after your treatment, but other times may last more long term, throughout your course of chemotherapy.

Eating well can help you feel better, if you are able to keep food down. Experts suggest that you try these tips:

- Eat a small meal or snack before you go to your treatment
- Bring a light meal or snack to eat after chemotherapy
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially if you are nauseous, vomiting, or have diarrhea
- Consume your largest meal when you feel best during the day
- Avoid foods with strong odors and high-fat foods, if you are feeling nauseous

Vitamin supplements

Taking a multivitamin is probably a good idea, especially if you are having trouble keeping food down. Make sure to tell your doctor if you are taking a multivitamin, large doses of other vitamins, or any herbal supplements. Sometimes supplements or herbs can interfere with the way medications work; so, only take them with your doctor's approval.

Preventing weight loss

Sometimes people do lose weight when they are getting chemotherapy. After all, it sometimes is hard to eat when you are feeling sick! However, eating well will prevent weight loss, and it might help you feel better and recover more quickly. These suggestions may help:

- Try to eat nutrient-dense foods, such as meat, dried beans, dairy foods, fruit, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains, if you can tolerate them
- Choose high-calorie goodies, such as like milk shakes
- Try drinking a commercial nutritional supplement, such as Ensure[®], if you are too tired to fuss over making and eating a meal or snack—they are a good source of calories, vitamins, and minerals
- Allow yourself to give into a craving and enjoy it, if your appetite has been poor and you suddenly find yourself wanting something in particular

Fighting tiredness

These tips may help when you feel tired and just do not feel like cooking:

- Do not force yourself to cook elaborate meals when you feel lousy; instead:
 - Ask friends or family to bring meals in
 - Rely on frozen meals
 - Get takeout from your favorite restaurants
- Graze, rather than taking the time to prepare a whole meal; it is easy to find healthy choices, including:
 - Yogurt
 - Cheese and crackers
 - Cereal and milk
 - Pudding
 - Nuts
 - Fruit
 - Vegetables
 - Small sandwiches

References

American Cancer Society. Chemotherapy. Available at:

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