



12 WAYS TO ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE DURING CHEMOTHERAPY

CHEMOTHERAPY IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE TOOL we have in stopping, slowing and curing cancer, but it's no walk in the park for those who receive it. The good news is, after more than 60 years of use, we've learned to better manage chemotherapy's side effects. The following tips were collected from the insight and experience of the tens of thousands of cancer patients who have been through it and seen the other side.

1 Maintain Regular Sleep

To help cope with fatigue common with cancer treatment, it's important to keep sleeping patterns consistent. Patients should get up and go to bed around the same time, even on the weekends. When tired, they should take a nap, just not so long as to disrupt nighttime sleep.

2 Hydrate

Hydrating before and after chemotherapy treatments is vital. Patients should drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water, and any non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated beverages they like. On the day before treatment, hydrating prepares the body for the dehydrating effects of treatment. On the day after, it helps to flush chemo meds out of the system.

3 Pack for Comfort

The patient should bring with them to treatment things that will make them more comfortable and at ease, which may include:

- Snacks
- Entertainment - book, DVDs, laptop or tablet, music player
- Blanket and/or beanie to stay warm
- Moisturizer and lip balm
- Comfortable clothes that allow easy port access (if needed)



4 Get Help for Nausea

Learn to prevent nausea, not just treat it. If the patient starts feeling nauseous, let the chemotherapy nurses know right away so they can help mitigate it. There are many nausea-prevention medications that can be prescribed by the oncologist. These meds should be taken as directed, not as symptoms begin. Some swear by ginger as a natural anti-nausea food. It can be eaten raw, cooked in food or made into tea.

5 Protect the Immune System

Immunity systems are wiped out by chemotherapy, so it is important to stay away from germ environments as much as possible. Some suggestions are obvious:

- Avoid crowds
- Wash hands frequently

Other suggestions include:

- Don't change cat litter (let someone else)
- Wear gloves if gardening
- Have everyone in household close toilet seat before flushing (good practice for general hygiene!)

6 Nourish the Body

While many patients in treatment lose their appetite or have severely affected taste buds, it is very important to continue fueling and nourishing the body. The patient should choose foods that are appealing,

and sometimes that means raspberry sorbet or peanut butter toast four times a day. Eating the perfect, nutritionally balanced diet is not always possible, so consider supplementing with a nutritional shake or investing in a juicer.

Eat small meals throughout the day to help manage nausea, and avoid favorite foods on treatment day — the mind tends to associate everything that day with the chemotherapy.

For healthy dishes that have been developed with cancer patients in mind, consider Rebecca Katz's, *The Cancer Fighting Kitchen* and *One Bite at a Time*.

7 Manage Digestive Issues

Chemo wipes out all the good gut bacteria, so a little help is often needed. Load up on fiber the day before chemo and for a week to ten days after to help maintain the digestive track.

If bulking up on fiber doesn't keep digestion on track, use Senokot for constipation and Immodium for diarrhea.

8 Oral Health

Mouth sores and metallic mouth taste are symptoms commonly associated with chemotherapy. Both can be successfully treated. Three or four times a day, gargle with cold water mixed with baking soda and salt, or use Biotene mouthwash.

Also, brush teeth and floss more often. Plaque and other coatings build up in the mouth from chemo, and the patient is more prone to infection because of weakened immunity.

9 Moisturize Eyes

Chemo tends to dry out eyes. Artificial tears eye drops (like Natural Tears) can alleviate the discomfort of dry eye.

10 Manage Hair Loss

How a patient deals with hair loss from chemotherapy is very personal. Some cut it short early — to get used to less hair — then shave when it begins to fall out. Wigs are a great option for some. If the patient thinks they will want to wear a wig, consider shopping for it before treatment begins. Have warm beanies on hand to wear at night.

11 Build Self-Esteem

Check out the American Cancer Society's <http://lookgoodfeelbetter.org> for ideas on how to improve appearance, self-esteem and confidence during treatment.

12 Ask For & Accept Help

Friends and family want to help. Let them. Be specific, whether what's needed is a home-cooked meal, an upbeat conversation, a ride to the store, or some peace and quiet to rest.

Sources

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