



**HUTCHINSON**  
REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

# Chemotherapy: Side Effects

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Chemotherapy can have many unpleasant side effects. Here is a list and some simple coping strategies.

**Fatigue:** the side effect that is most often associated with chemotherapy.

What to do:

Sleep later in the morning or go to bed earlier at night. Change your work schedule to part-time, if possible. Be sure to drink 6-8 glasses of fluid daily. Try to maintain usual lifestyle.



**Decreased Appetite:**

What to do:

A small walk (5-10 minutes) prior to meals. Eat smaller frequent meals (6-8) meals daily. Avoid fluids during meals. Eat slowly and chew food thoroughly. The aroma of food cooking is a good appetite stimulant. Report to your physician the inability to eat.

**Sore mouth and gums:**

What to do:

Maintain oral hygiene. Use a soft nylon bristle toothbrush after each meal. Floss twice daily, avoid if low platelet count. Use special mouthwash. Your nurse will share the recipe. Keep lips moist with lip balm. Inspect your mouth/gums daily. Report any sores or patches to your doctor. Avoid smoking, chewing tobacco and alcoholic beverages. Avoid irritating foods and very hot temperature.

**Nausea and Vomiting**

What to do:

Nausea/vomiting over 24 hours should be reported to physician. Get plenty of rest. Try small meals, bland foods and avoid sweet, fatty, highly salted and spicy foods. Discuss concerns with your nurse.

**Diarrhea**

What to do:

Try the B.R.A.T. diet Bananas, Rice, Applesauce and Toast. Eat a diet high in calories and protein. Monitor fats and fiber.

**Constipation**

What to do:

Use a stool softener such as Colace or Senokot. This is especially important if you are using medication for pain control. If you do not have a bowel movement in 2 days, use an over the counter product like Milk of Magnesia. If no results within 24 hours, contact your physician.

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### **Lowered Red blood Cells (Anemia):**

Red blood cells carry oxygen to all parts of our body. When red blood cells are low symptoms include: dizziness, feeling tired or weak and shortness of breath. Report symptoms to your physician.

### **Lowered Platelets (Thrombocytopenia):**

Platelets help blood to clot. Patients with low platelets should do everything to prevent bleeding. Discuss with your nurse behaviors to avoid. Report any bleeding to your doctor.

### **Hair Loss (Alopecia)**

This is an emotional, but very temporary condition. Your hair will grow back when treatments are stopped.

Purchase a wig before treatment starts and begin wearing before treatment starts. Use hats, scarves or turbans. Protect your head from sun.



### **Infection:**

Do everything possible to avoid an infection. Measures include: avoids crowds, ill people and people recently vaccinated. Stay away from animal droppings. Avoid sources of stagnant water. Wash hands frequently. Check temperature daily. Report signs of infection to your physician.