

Side Effect Management: Nutrition Related Tips

Side effects are different for every patient and can be managed. Common ones include: nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite, changes in taste and smell, fatigue, weight loss, mouth sores, diarrhea and constipation. By following the tips below, you can take an active role in your care.

Nausea and Vomiting

Medicines work well to control nausea and vomiting, but making changes in your diet can also be helpful.

Foods

- Eat small amounts of food six to eight times per day to help keep something in your stomach.
- Snack on dry foods between meals such as crackers, toast, cereal or breadsticks.
- Try not to eat your favorite foods when you have nausea or vomiting. Later, you may associate these foods with nausea.
- Avoid greasy or spicy foods and foods with strong smells. Cold and bland foods may be more appealing because they tend to have fewer odors.
- Try lemon drops, mints, ginger candy and tart foods (such as pickles and lemons) which are helpful for some patients.

Fluids

- Drink 8 to 10 cups (1 cup = 8 ounces) of fluids per day or discuss your needs with your dietitian. Try clear soups, flavored gelatin, lemonade, popsicles, mint or ginger tea and ice chips made of any kind of liquid.
- Drink fluids between meals instead of with meals.
- Drink fluids from a cup with a lid and sip through a straw if smells are triggering nausea.

Additional Tips

- Take nausea medicine 30 minutes before meals.
- Keep your head elevated by 30 degrees or sit up for at least 30 minutes after eating.
- Eat in a well-ventilated area or outside to avoid strong smells. Ask a friend or family member to prepare your meals for you.

Loss of Appetite

Try these suggestions to help maintain weight and keep energy levels up:

- Eat every two to three hours and choose foods and fluids that are high in calories and protein.
- Avoid fried or greasy foods.
- Keep snacks available like: peanut butter and crackers, cheese and crackers, high protein smoothies, granola bars, nuts and liquid nutrition supplements.
- Take advantage of hunger. Eat your largest meal when you are most hungry.
- Light exercise like walking, before a meal may help increase your appetite.

Changes in Taste and Smell

- Practice good mouth care. Brush your teeth and tongue after every meal. Rinsing your mouth with a baking soda solution before eating may help. To make the solution, mix 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda in 4 ounces of water.
- To decrease the smell of foods, eat foods cold or at room temperature. For soups or fluids, try using a cup with a lid and sip through a straw.
- If you have a metallic taste in your mouth, try using plastic utensils and avoid canned food.
- For salty or bitter tastes, try adding honey, agave nectar, maple syrup or jam to foods.
- For sweet tastes, increase salty and tart flavors with lemon wedges, citrus fruits, vinegar, pickled foods or salt (avoid these if you have a sore mouth or throat).
- Try adding seasonings to your food such as basil, oregano, mint, rosemary, tarragon, onion, garlic, barbeque sauce, chili powder, ketchup or mustard to make foods taste better. Marinate and cook meat in sweet juices, sauces, fruits, acidic dressings or wines.
- If you are unable to eat meats due to taste changes, make sure to include plenty of other protein sources in your diet. Foods high in protein include fish, eggs, beans, nuts, soymilk, tofu, milk, cheese, yogurt and peanut butter.
- To clear your taste buds or remove a taste from your mouth, try these: sugar-free gum and peppermints, pickles, lemons or lemon drops, lemon or lime sorbet or frozen fresh fruits, such as grapes, melon or oranges.

Fatigue

- Drink 8 to 10 cups (1 cup = 8 ounces) of fluids per day or discuss your needs with your dietitian.
- Eat a well balanced diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and quality protein sources.
- Let friends and family prepare meals or bring them to you.
- Buy ready-to-eat pre-portioned meals or make high protein smoothies.
- On days that you feel rested, cook extra food and freeze it.
- Eat small, frequent meals instead of larger meals and keep snacks handy.
- Keep naps short to prevent skipping a meal.
- Light activity and walking can give you more energy and improve your appetite.

Weight loss

Adding calories and protein to your diet can help slow or stop weight loss.

Healthy, High-Calorie Food and Beverage Choices

- Honey and jam
- Dried fruit and fruit juices
- Olive, canola and almond oil
- Avocado
- Instant breakfast drinks and powders*
- Liquid nutritional supplements like Boost[®] or Ensure[®]

High-Protein Foods

- Beans and legumes
- Cooked meats, poultry and fish
- Eggs
- Milk, yogurt and cottage cheese*
- Meat alternatives from vegetable protein (veggie burgers)
- Soy milk and tofu
- Nuts and nut butters like peanut butter

*These products may contain lactose. If you are lactose intolerant, consider using lactose-free milk, soy milk and lactose-free cheese.

Mouth Sores

- Choose soft, moist foods. Avoid rough-textured, acidic, tart and spicy foods that may cause irritation.
- Cut foods into small bites.
- Puree foods in a blender by adding liquids such as milk or broth.
- Drink through a straw to help push the food beyond painful areas.
- Avoid extremely hot foods and extremely cold foods. Try drinking fluids and eating foods that are at room temperature.
- Drink 8 to 10 cups (1 cup = 8 ounces) of fluids per day or discuss your needs with your dietitian.
- Practice good mouth care. Brush your teeth and tongue after every meal. Rinsing your mouth with a baking soda solution before eating may help. To make the solution, mix 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda in 4 ounces of water.

Diarrhea

- Drink 8 to 10 cups (1 cup = 8 ounces) of fluids per day or discuss your needs with your dietitian. Drink the majority of your fluids between meals rather than with meals.
- Sodium and potassium (electrolytes) are lost when you have diarrhea. Eat salted crackers, pretzels or broth to replace sodium. Consume potatoes (without skin), bananas and juices such as carrot, orange and papaya to replace potassium. Include electrolyte drinks such as G2[®] (Gatorade[®] product), Pedialyte[®] and mixing equal parts of Gatorade[®] or Powerade[®] with equal part water.
- Eat small frequent meals.
- Limit high-fiber foods such as dried peas and beans, seeds, whole grains and high-fiber fruits and vegetables or those with thick peels and skins.
- Limit high-fat foods such as fried food, greasy food, rich desserts (pies, cakes and cookies) and excessive amounts of butter, oil and cream.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, spicy foods and hot fluids (including soup) which cause food to move more quickly through the intestines.
- Limit or avoid dairy products if they make diarrhea worse.

Constipation

Fiber Intake

Fiber helps bowel movements by making stools softer and easier to pass. Gradually increasing fiber in your diet will help decrease gas, bloating and abdominal cramps.

- Eat dry cereals with more than 4 grams of fiber per serving, such as Raisin Bran[®], All Bran[®], Shredded Wheat[®] or Fiber One[®].
- Eat whole grains such as brown rice, barley, quinoa, oats and 100% whole grain breads instead of white rice and potatoes.
- Add wheat germ or bran to cereal, yogurt, salads, casseroles or baked products.
- Add more beans and legumes in your diet.
- Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Choose snacks such as raw fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds or popcorn.

Adequate Fluid Intake

- Drink 8 to 10 cups (1 cup = 8 ounces) of fluids per day, or discuss your needs with your dietitian. Drink the majority of your fluids between meals rather than with meals.
- Drink warm prune juice or other warm drinks which cause foods to move more quickly through the intestines.

Exercise

Regular moderate exercise (as tolerated), such as walking, can strengthen and stimulate the muscles that help move food and stool through the digestive system.

If you have any questions about your diet, talk with your registered dietitian at the Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center.

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