



## Managing Side Effects in Cancer Care

Because cancer cells grow and divide rapidly, many cancer treatments are made to destroy fast-growing cells. Cancer treatments can also damage healthy cells and tissues, often causing side effects. Side effects are unique to the cancer type and stage, as well as the treatment you receive. As you fight cancer, it's important to minimize side effects so you can stay strong and continue your treatment plan. It's also important to reduce side effects so you can maintain your quality of life.

The information below is to help you understand and manage some of the more common side effects related to cancer care. The oncology team at Amber Specialty Pharmacy is here to help you manage side effects by providing counseling, support and answering any questions you have.



### Appetite Loss

Changes in your appetite and the way food tastes are common with cancer and cancer treatment. You may eat less than usual or not feel hungry. You may feel full after eating only a little and food may taste bland. You may also notice a metallic taste in your mouth and sour tastes may be more intense. Proper nutrition is essential during treatment. A dietitian may be helpful during this time. If you're unable to maintain your weight or eat enough, your healthcare team may recommend a nutritional supplement.

- ▶ Eat your favorite foods on days you don't have treatment. Your favorite foods will continue to have a positive association and won't remind you of anything unpleasant.
- ▶ Learn about eating problems before treatment starts. Many people feel more in control when they know what to expect and how to manage problems.
- ▶ Make mealtimes as relaxed as possible.
- ▶ Eat small meals five to six times a day, rather than three large ones, and keep snacks within reach.
- ▶ If your food seems bland, try adding more seasonings to your food.
- ▶ Speak with a therapist or counselor if your loss of appetite is from stress and anxiety.

*Appetite Loss Continued...*

- ▶ Meet with a dietitian. Dietitians can help guide you in meeting your nutritional needs. Amber Specialty Pharmacy offers nutritional support and guidance to patients. You can be referred to our Registered Dietitian for assistance.
- ▶ Avoid unpleasant odors and food smells.
- ▶ Drinking ginger ale or mint tea may help if your mouth tastes metallic.

## Anemia

Anemia is when your blood lacks enough healthy red blood cells. Cancer-related anemia can be caused by chemotherapy, radiation therapy, iron deficiency, blood loss or cancer itself. People with severe anemia may experience the following:

- Fatigue
- Coldness in hands/feet
- Headache
- Pale skin
- Chest pain
- Trouble breathing
- Dizziness

It's important to go to all scheduled lab appointments and keep in close contact with your doctor to manage this side effect. If you feel any of the above side effects, you should contact your doctor right away.

- ▶ Try to maintain your regular routine however allow rest when rest is needed. Pay attention to your body and listen to what it is telling you. Taking time to rest when you feel tired and fatigued can be very helpful.
- ▶ Ask loved ones to help you with things like child care, shopping, housecleaning or driving.
- ▶ Eat a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of water.

## Pain

Pain can be a common symptom when dealing with cancer and it can make other aspects of cancer seem worse, like fatigue, weakness, nausea, trouble sleeping or anxiety. Tell your doctor if you have pain or if your pain increases.

- ▶ Prevention is key when managing pain. It's important to take your pain medication exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Stay ahead of your pain by taking your medication before pain becomes severe.
- ▶ Tell your doctor if you have pain or if it increases.
- ▶ Ask your doctor about acupuncture, meditation or massage therapy.

## Diarrhea and Constipation

People going through cancer treatment may experience diarrhea or constipation. Don't be embarrassed to share your concerns with your healthcare team. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about medications that you can take to help relieve these symptoms. Tell your doctor if your symptoms don't improve or become severe.

- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids without caffeine (water, low-sugar sports drinks, etc.).
- ▶ For diarrhea - eat small meals of soft, bland, low fiber foods - bananas, white bread, rice, noodles or chicken. Avoid foods that are spicy, fatty, high in sugar, high in fiber, or contain dairy.
- ▶ For constipation - eat foods high in fiber - whole grain breads and cereals, raw fruits and vegetables, prunes or beans.
- ▶ Increase your activity or exercise level - walking is a great way to get more exercise.



## Mouth Sores or Mucositis

---

Mucositis is inflammation of the mouth and throat that can lead to painful ulcers and mouth sores. Mucositis can be caused by some types of chemotherapy or by radiation therapy. If mucositis becomes severe you may have trouble eating and drinking. It's important to share your symptoms with your doctor if mouth sores become a concern.

- ▶ Keep your mouth clean throughout the day. Brush your teeth after each meal with a soft toothbrush. The American Dental Association recommends replacing your toothbrush approximately every 3-4 months.
- ▶ Use mild toothpaste without whitening agents and make sure your mouthwash doesn't contain alcohol.
- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ▶ Avoid spicy, salty or acidic foods and alcoholic drinks.
- ▶ If you have dentures, minimize the time you wear them and remove them at night.
- ▶ Tell your oncologist if you develop any sores inside your mouth or if you have pain when you swallow.

## Headaches

---

During treatment, you may experience headaches. Depending on the severity, your headaches may make you feel nauseous or dizzy. Headaches may vary on how long they last or how often you have them.

- ▶ Ask your doctor if you are able to take pain relievers, which ones are best for you and what dose you should take.
- ▶ Drink a lot of water, unless your doctor has limited how much you can have.
- ▶ Don't drink caffeine.
- ▶ If you get a headache, keep the lights dim and avoid loud noises and strong smells. Rest and try to relax until the headache goes away.
- ▶ Seek medical attention if these tips don't relieve your headache, if the headache is severe or if you have additional symptoms (vision changes, numbness, confusion or trouble speaking).

.....

**Cancer care is a unique experience that can impact every area of a patient's life.**

.....

## Nausea, Vomiting and Dehydration

---

Cancer treatment may cause nausea and vomiting. Mild nausea and vomiting can be uncomfortable however does not always lead to serious problems. If you experience nausea and vomiting, talk to your doctor about medications that can help. Instead of eating three big meals, eat small meals throughout the day. Having an empty stomach or eating too much can cause discomfort. Vomiting can also lead to dehydration and weight loss. Drink at least eight glasses of water each day. It's key to find out what makes you nauseous and take steps to control it.

- ▶ Drink and eat slowly.
- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ▶ Drink peppermint, chamomile or ginger tea to settle your stomach.
- ▶ Allow time to rest after eating to help with digestion.
- ▶ Eat foods at room temperature.
- ▶ Avoid foods or food odors that may make you nauseous. Hot food smells stronger, so wait to eat until food cools if smells bother you.
- ▶ Avoid greasy, fried or spicy foods.
- ▶ Try to get plenty of rest.
- ▶ Add a slice of lemon, lime, mint or cucumber to your water for flavor.

## Trouble Sleeping

---

During cancer treatment, you may have trouble sleeping. Low energy, trouble thinking, mood swings and fatigue can be directly related to a lack of sleep. It's important to tell your doctor if you aren't getting enough sleep.

- ▶ Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. Having a routine before bed may help you fall asleep faster.
- ▶ Try a relaxing activity before bed, like reading or taking a bubble bath.
- ▶ Avoid naps.
- ▶ Make sure you exercise each day. Avoid strenuous exercise close to bedtime as it may make it more difficult to fall asleep.
- ▶ Sleep in a quiet, dark room.
- ▶ Make sure your mattress and pillows are supportive.
- ▶ Your doctor may prescribe medication to help you sleep.





## Thrombocytopenia

---

Thrombocytopenia is the term for an unusually low level of platelets in the blood. People with low levels of platelets can bleed and bruise more easily. Some types of chemotherapy can cause thrombocytopenia. Symptoms include:

- Unexpected or excessive bruising
- Superficial bleeding in the skin; small purple or red spots under the skin
- Prolonged bleeding from cuts
- Bleeding from your gums or nose
- Blood in urine or stools
- Dizziness
- Severe headaches
- Increased weakness

People undergoing cancer treatment known to cause thrombocytopenia will receive regular blood tests to monitor for this condition. Sometimes medications, surgery or a blood transfusion can help treat thrombocytopenia. Bleeding that won't stop is considered a medical emergency. Seek help if you experience bleeding that can't be controlled by using first aid.

- ▶ Don't drink alcohol or take medications without checking with your doctor first.
- ▶ Be careful using scissors, knives or sharp tools.
- ▶ Use an extra soft toothbrush and don't floss if your gums begin to bleed.
- ▶ Shave with an electric razor.

## Neutropenia

---

Neutropenia is an abnormally low level of neutrophils, which are a type of white blood cell. These white blood cells help your body fight off infection. People with neutropenia have a higher risk of developing infections. Neutropenia occurs in about half of people with cancer who are receiving chemotherapy.

Neutropenia itself doesn't cause any symptoms but it can be detected by a blood test. Because it is common during chemotherapy, your doctor will monitor for this condition with regular blood tests. With neutropenia, minor infections can quickly become serious.

Tell your doctor right away if you experience any of the following signs of infection:

- A fever of 100.4°F or greater
- Chills or sweating
- A sore throat or sores in your mouth
- Abdominal pain
- A cough or feeling out of breath
- Any redness, swelling or pain around a cut, wound or an IV catheter site

# FAQs

---

Cancer care is a unique experience that can impact every area of a patient's life. At Amber Specialty Pharmacy, each oncology patient has a healthcare team that serves as their advocate during treatment. Our cancer care services include education, counseling and support. We are here to help throughout every phase of the cancer journey.

## ***What is cancer?***

Cancer is a group of over 100 diseases with many causes. Cancer is the development of abnormal cells that can infiltrate and destroy normal body tissue. Cancer can spread to other parts of the body through the blood and lymph systems. Survival rates are improving for many types of cancer due to better cancer screening and treatment options.

## ***What causes cancer?***

Cancer is caused by both external and internal factors. External factors can include tobacco use, sun exposure or radiation. Internal factors can include hormones, immune conditions and inherited mutations. Scientists continue to study factors that may influence a person's chance of having cancer.

## ***What are the symptoms of cancer?***

The signs of cancer vary depending on the type of cancer and what part of the body is affected. Some general symptoms of cancer include:

- Fatigue
- Weight changes
- Changes in bowel or bladder habits
- Regular cough
- Trouble swallowing
- Hoarseness
- Lump that can be felt under the skin
- Skin changes, like redness, darkening or yellowing

These symptoms are not always a warning sign of cancer. They can be caused by other conditions. Be sure to see your doctor if you have any of these symptoms. The early stages of cancer don't usually cause pain, so see a doctor even if you feel no pain with these symptoms.

## ***Can cancer be prevented?***

There is no certain way to prevent cancer but there are ways to reduce your cancer risk, such as:

- Don't use tobacco. Tobacco use is linked to several types of cancer.
- Avoid too much sun exposure. Use sunscreen and clothing that protects your skin.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Schedule regular cancer screenings.
- Ask your doctor about immunizations.

## ***How is cancer treated?***

Treatment is often most effective when cancer is found early. Treatment options will depend on several factors, including the type and stage of your cancer, your general health and your preferences. Some options include:

- Surgery to remove cancer.
- Chemotherapy uses drugs that kill cancer cells.
- Radiation therapy uses high-powered energy beams to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors.
- A stem cell transplant is used to restore stem cells when bone marrow has been destroyed.
- Medications may block the growth and spread of cancer.
- Clinical trials are researching new ways to treat cancer. Many cancer patients take part in clinical trials that test new treatment methods.

## ***Are there side effects from the medications?***

Because cancer treatments can damage healthy cells and tissues, patients often experience side effects. At Amber Specialty Pharmacy, we offer a dedicated healthcare team that specializes in oncology. They have training and experience in working with cancer patients. This team provides counseling and support to help manage side effects that are associated with cancer care.

## ***Can I afford care and treatment?***

At Amber Specialty Pharmacy, we understand medications can be a financial burden for many patients. Our team proactively helps patients apply for co-pay cards and financial assistance.



## Amber Specialty Pharmacy is here to help.

We offer guidance and support through our dedicated team of healthcare experts. From the beginning, we help you with the enrollment process and review your insurance coverage. We explore financial assistance opportunities to help you lower your medication costs whenever possible. Our pharmacists review your prescriptions with you - including how to take your medication and manage any side effects. Pharmacists are available 24/7 to assist you when you have questions. Our Registered Nurse and Registered Dietitian offer personalized consultations to assist you with any medically-based questions and nutritional care. We stay in touch with you regularly to remind you when it is time to refill your prescriptions. We are always here to help.

### **Additional Resources:**

American Cancer Society – [cancer.org](https://cancer.org)  
Association of Community Cancer Centers – [accc-cancer.org](https://accc-cancer.org)  
Cancer 101 – [cancer101.org](https://cancer101.org)  
Cancer News – [cancernews.com](https://cancernews.com)  
Cancer Updates, Research and Education (CURE) – [curetoday.com](https://curetoday.com)  
Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS) – [lls.org](https://lls.org)  
National Cancer Institute – [cancer.gov](https://cancer.gov)  
National Comprehensive Cancer Network – [nccn.org](https://nccn.org)

This information is intended for educational purposes only. The material is not a substitute for professional help or medical diagnosis. It is important that you consult a medical professional if this information leads you to believe there is a concern for you or your patient(s). The diagnosis and treatment of all physical and/or psychological disorders requires a trained professional.