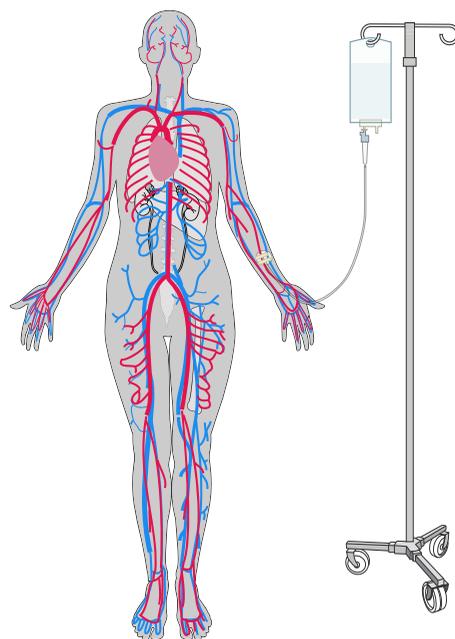
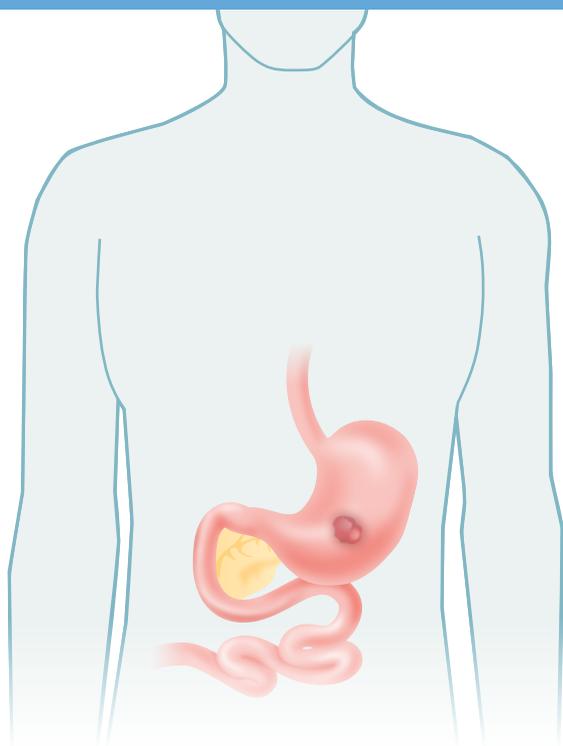


Stomach Cancer

Section 5 : Chemotherapy



Centre universitaire
de santé McGill



McGill University
Health Centre

Office d'éducation des patients
Patient Education Office

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IMPORTANT

Information provided by this booklet is for educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional healthcare practitioner, or to substitute medical care. Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.



This material is also available through the MUHC Patient Education Office website www.muhcpatienteducation.ca

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What is chemotherapy?

Depending on the stage of your cancer, your treatment team may suggest chemotherapy as part of your treatment. Your treatment team will explain if you need chemotherapy, and if so, what this will look like for you.



This section will give you information about chemotherapy. It will explain:

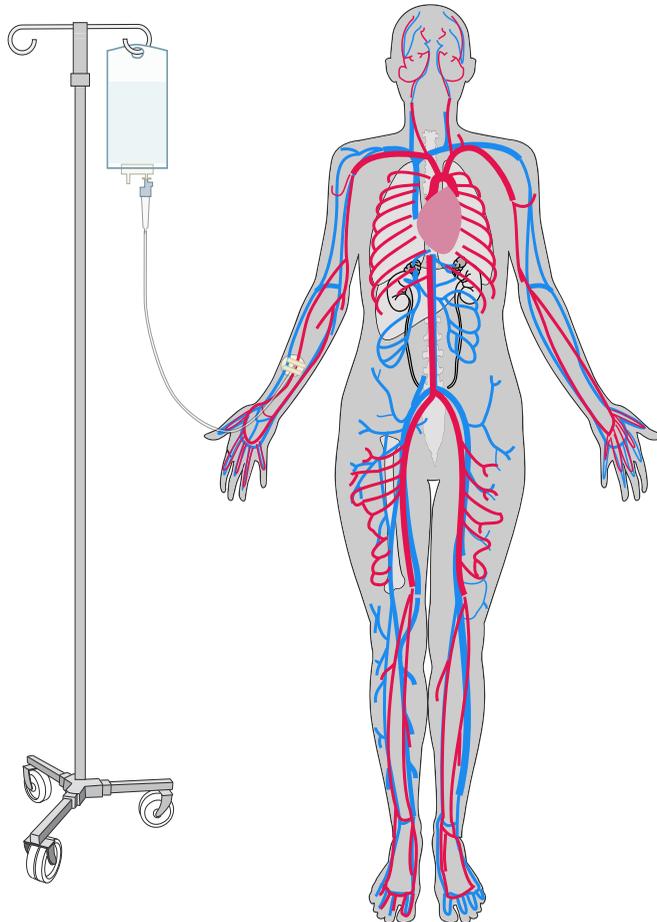
- what it is,
- how it works,
- how to prepare,
- what happens during a treatment,
- how to manage side effects, and more.

This is also covered in the information package that you will get from your chemotherapy team.

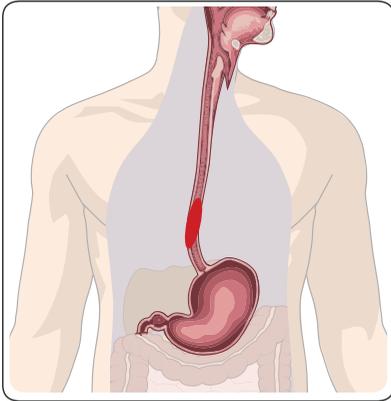
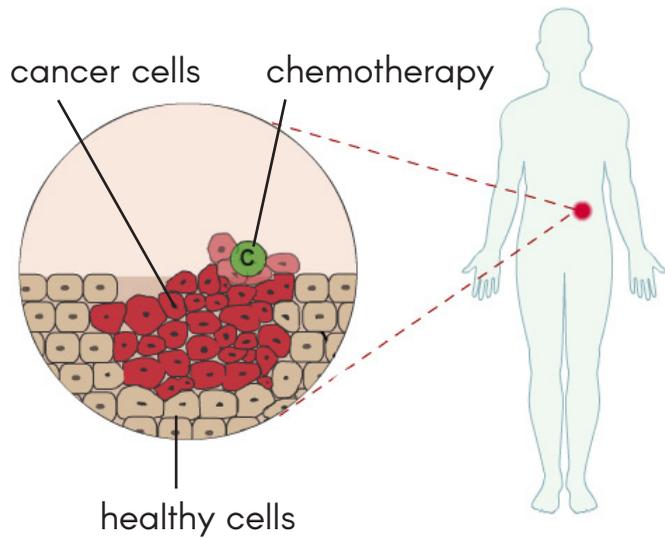
Your chemotherapy plan depends on:

- the type of cancer you have,
- your age,
- your health, and
- how you would like to deal with the side effects.

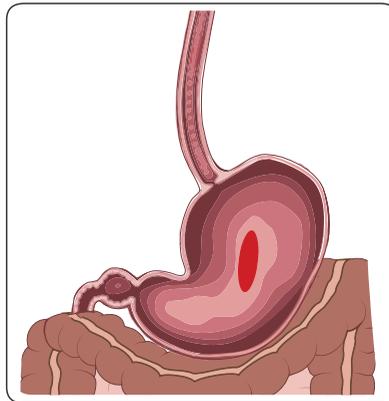
Talk with your treatment team if you have questions. Together, you will decide whether you will have chemotherapy and, if so, what this will look like for you.



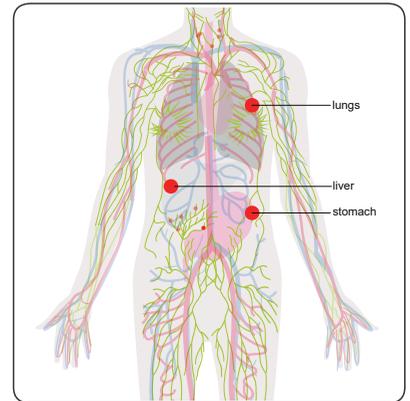
Chemotherapy uses powerful medications to kill cancer cells.



Chemotherapy may be used to prevent cancer from coming back.

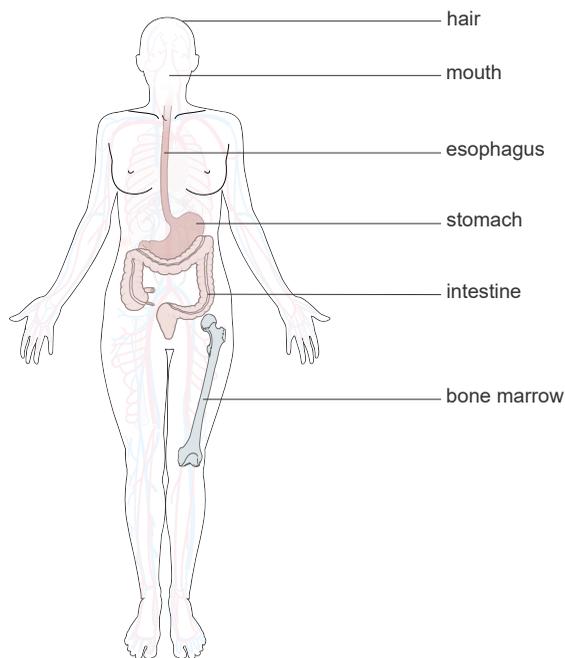


Chemotherapy may also be used to treat cancer that has come back after treatment (**recurrence**).

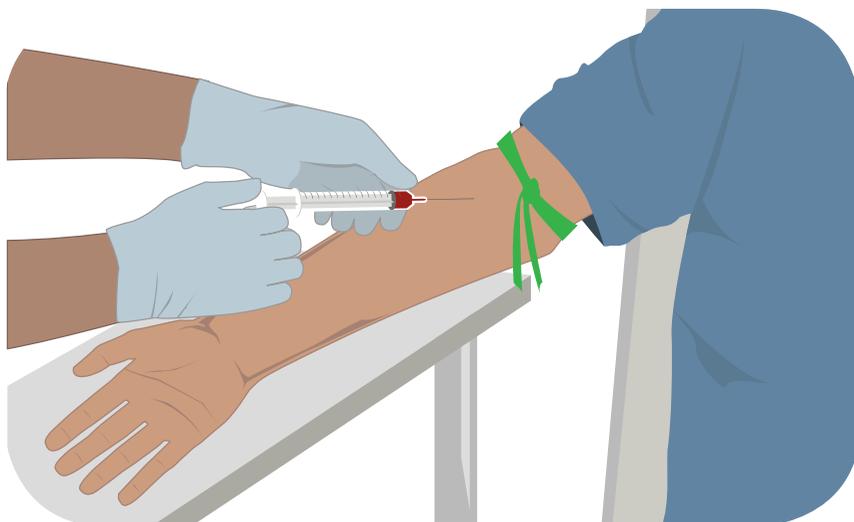


Chemotherapy may be used to treat cancer cells that have travelled to other places in the body (**metastasis**).

Chemotherapy works by destroying fast-growing cells, such as cancer cells. However, it also damages healthy cells that grow fast. These include the cells that make up your hair, bone marrow, the lining of your mouth, esophagus, stomach and intestines. That is one of the reasons people get side effects from chemotherapy.



You will need regular blood tests throughout your treatment to check how chemotherapy is affecting the cells in your bone marrow. Your treatment team will discuss this with you.

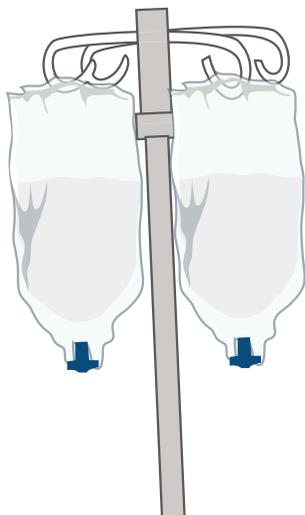


Chemotherapy looks different for everyone. Some people receive one medication. Other people receive two or more. What you get is called your chemotherapy protocol or regimen.



Chemotherapy medications come in different forms:

It can be a liquid that is given through a vein.



It can also be pills.



How do I manage side effects?

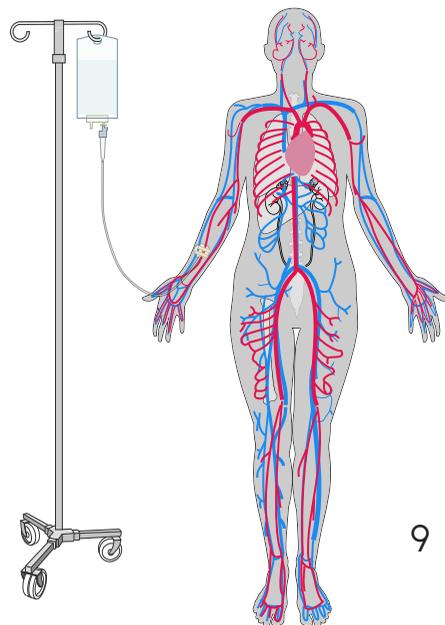
This chapter will explain chemotherapy side effects. It will cover

- what this is,
- how to prepare, and how to manage.

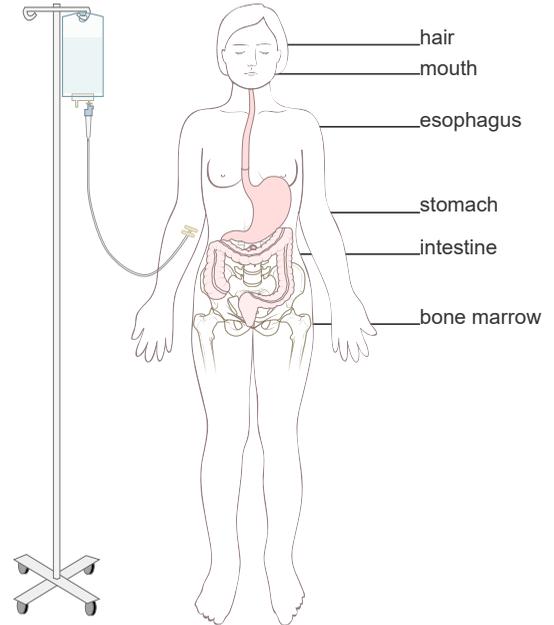
This information is also covered in your welcome package.



Chemotherapy is **systemic**. This means it goes everywhere in your body, using your blood vessels, the system of tubes in your body which carry your blood. In this way, chemotherapy treats the whole body. It can find and treat cancer cells anywhere in your body wherever they are.



Chemotherapy works by destroying fast-growing cells. It also damages healthy cells that grow fast. This can result in side effects, or unwanted reactions.



The most common side effects are:

hair loss



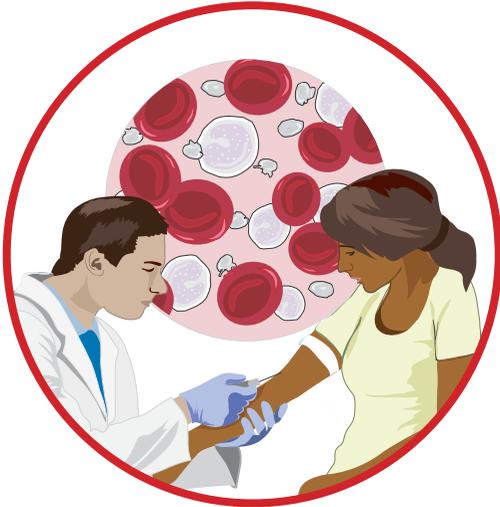
constipation



diarrhea



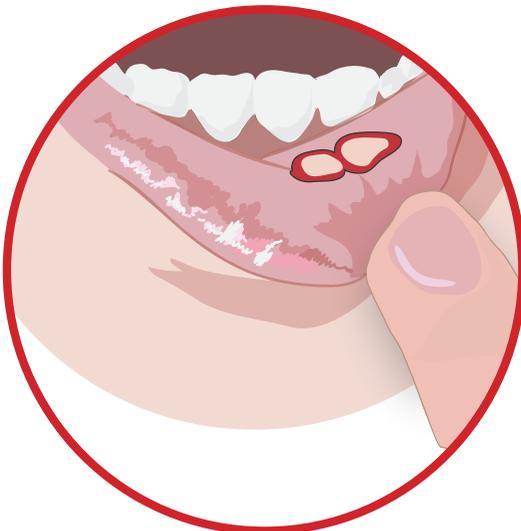
Lower blood counts



Nausea & vomiting



Mouth sores



Fatigue



Not everyone will have all of these side effects.
You may have different side effects than someone else.

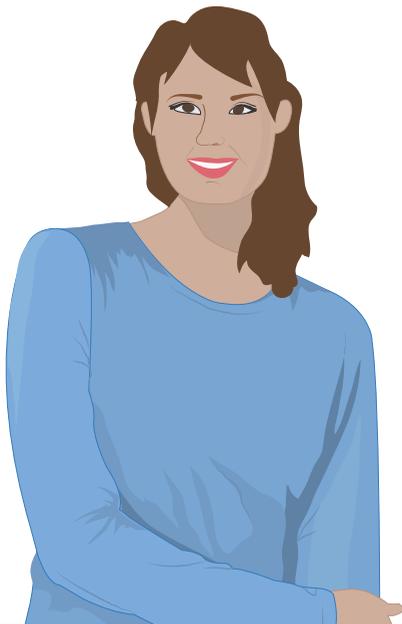
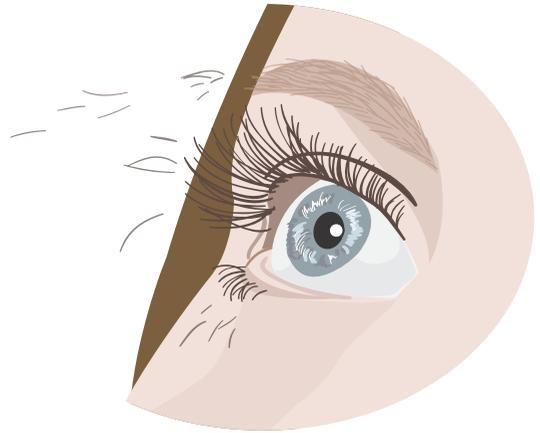
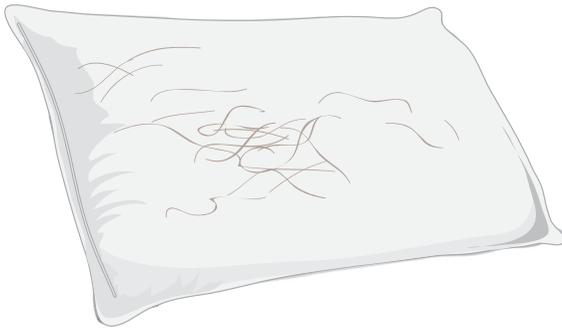
Side effects can usually be controlled or reduced. There are many medications and strategies that can help.

Speak to your treatment team about any problems you are having so that they can help you. The next few slides will cover the most common side effects and tips on managing each one.



Chemotherapy can cause: Hair loss

Sometimes your eyelashes, eyebrows, armpit hair, pubic hair and other body hair can fall out.



However, after your treatment is finished, your hair will grow back.

You will likely have a full head of hair 6 months to 1 year after the end of the treatment.

Tips to manage hair loss:

Use a soft brush, a gentle shampoo and only wash your hair when needed.



Consider wearing a wig, scarf or other head covering.



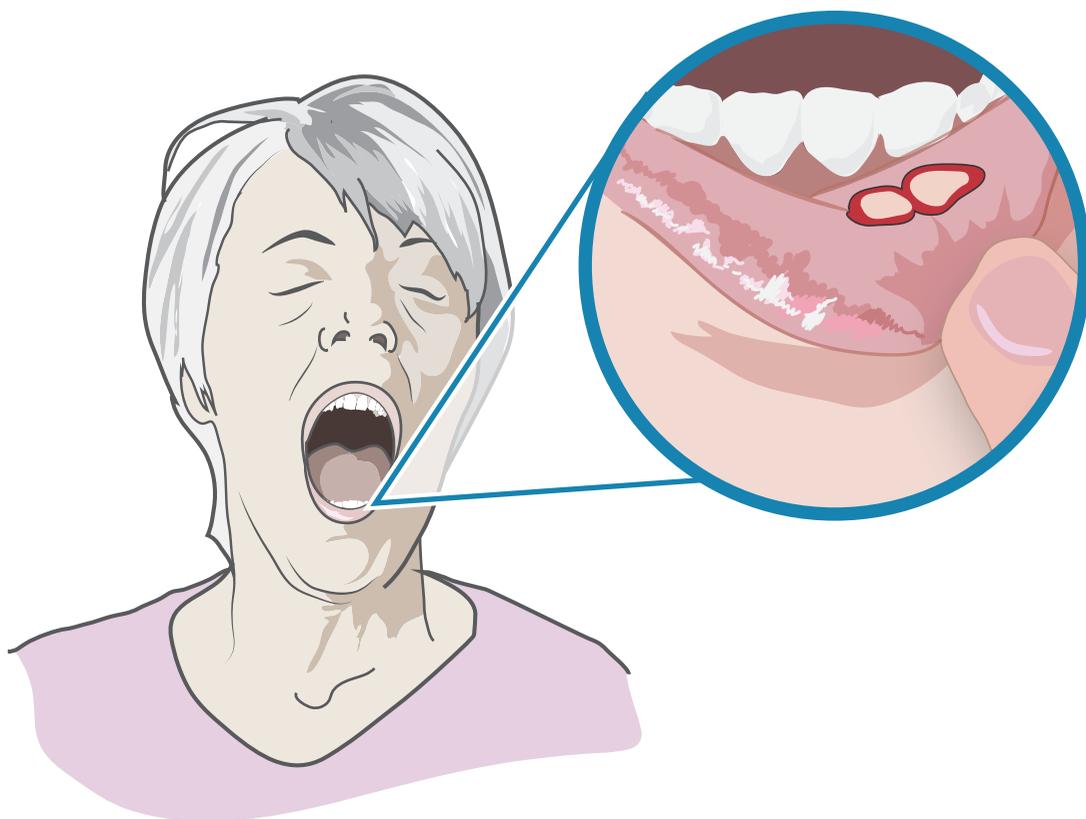
Protect your scalp. Use sunscreen or a head covering if your scalp is going to be exposed to heat (the sun) or cold.



Chemotherapy can cause: Mouth sores

When mouth cells are damaged, it is harder for your mouth to heal itself and to fight off bacteria. This can result in sores and infections anywhere in your mouth and on your lips.

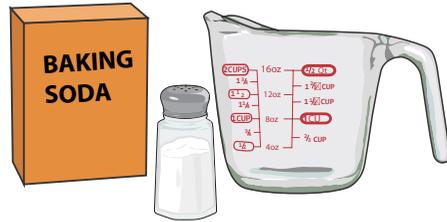
Mouth sores usually start a few days after treatment begins and go away 10 -14 days after treatment ends.



Tips to manage mouth sores:



Use a soft toothbrush after each meal.



Rinse your mouth often with salt water or baking soda in water, especially after meals.



Do not use commercial mouthwashes.



Do not floss, especially if your white blood cell count is low.

IMPORTANT: If you are unable to drink for 24 hours, speak to your treatment team (514-934-8007).

Chemotherapy and some medications for nausea can cause constipation

Tips to manage constipation:

Drink 8 glasses (at least 2 litres) of liquid each day.



Do some light activity, such as walking, each day.



Increase the fibre in the foods you eat. If possible, eat fresh fruit and vegetables, whole grains, cereals, breads, and beans. Drink prune juice.



Some medications can help. Speak to your treatment team.



IMPORTANT: speak to your treatment team (514-934-8007) if you have not had a bowel movement for 3 days.

Chemotherapy can give you diarrhea

Diarrhea is when you have watery bowel movements. When the cells in your intestines are damaged, they don't soak up as much water as they normally do.

This makes your bowel movements watery.

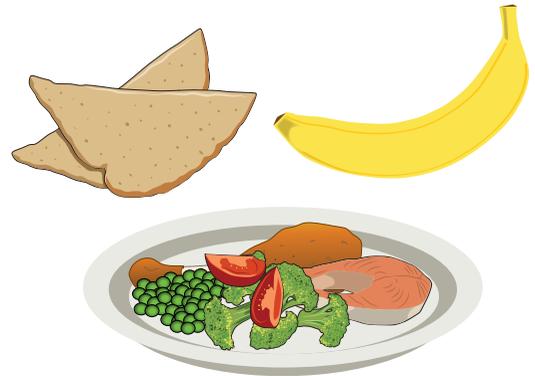
Diarrhea can also be caused by an infection, by some medications used to treat infections, or by stress and anxiety.



Tips to manage diarrhea:



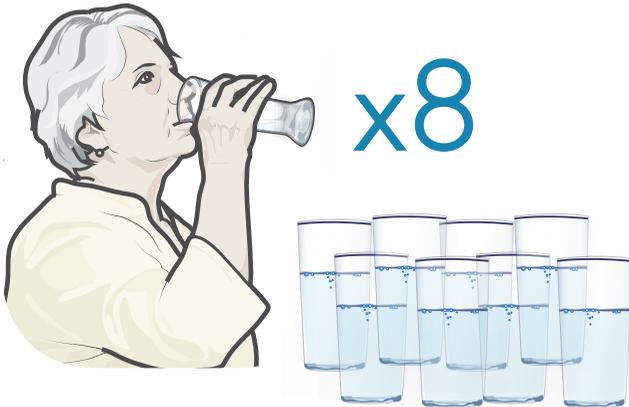
Try clear beverages, such as water, juice, clear broth, or popsicles, to allow your bowels to rest.



Eat low fibre foods, such as bananas, white rice, cooked vegetables and applesauce.

Tips to manage diarrhea:

Drink 8 glasses (at least 2 litres) of liquid each day.



Try a sports drink. This will help you replace your electrolytes.



Some medications can help. Speak to your treatment team.

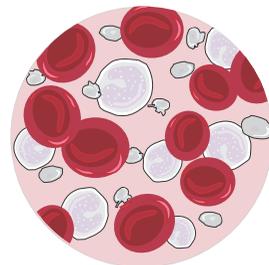


IMPORTANT:

Speak to your treatment team (514-934-8007) if you have 3 or more loose or watery bowel movements in a day.

Chemotherapy can lower your blood cell counts

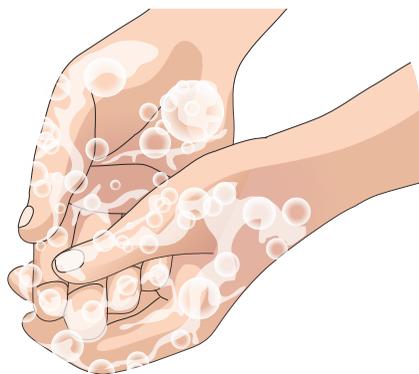
Blood cells that grow and divide quickly are more likely to be damaged by chemotherapy. When your white blood cells are low it is easier for you to get an infection. When your red blood cells are low, you may feel more tired than usual. When your platelets are low, you may bleed more easily.



Tips to prevent infection: (lower white blood cell counts)

Wash your hands frequently.

Ask people who are sick not to visit.



IMPORTANT: Speak to your treatment team (514-934-8007) if you have a temperature of 38.2°C (100.8°F) or more -OR- you have a temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) that lasts for more than one hour.

Tips to help with fatigue (lower red blood cell counts)



Do light exercise.

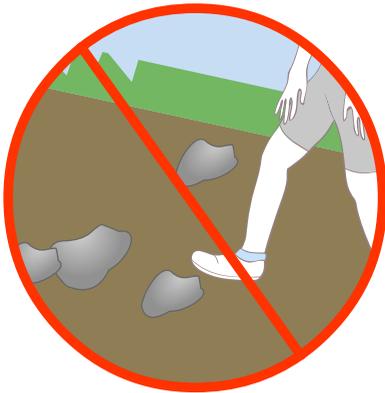


Rest between activities.

IMPORTANT: Speak to your treatment team (514-934-8007) if you feel too short of breath, too tired to do any activities, dizzy or feel your heart is racing.

Tips to prevent bleeding (low platelet blood cell counts)

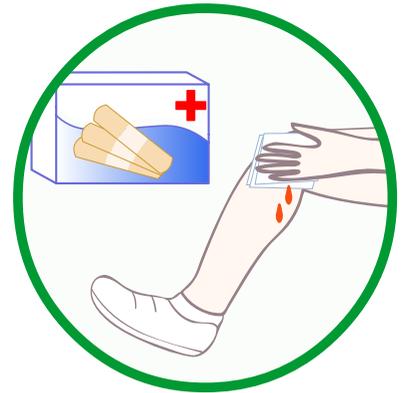
Try to avoid injury
(even small cuts
and scrapes).



Do not take aspirin
unless your doctor
knows.



Make sure you stop
bleeding if you cut
yourself, make
sure you stop the
bleeding.



IMPORTANT: Speak to your treatment team (514-934-8007) if you have black bowel movements.

If the clinic is closed and you know you need to see a doctor,
go to the emergency department (514-934-1934 extension 38737).

Chemotherapy can make you feel tired

Feeling tired is also called fatigue. It can be mild or severe, happen only once or last months. It has many causes:

- the cancer,
- your treatments,
- ongoing pain,
- medications,
- poor diet,
- stress,
- anxiety,
- lack of sleep, and
- lack of exercise.

How you and your treatment team deals with your fatigue depends on the cause.



Tips to manage fatigue:

Take the time to rest.

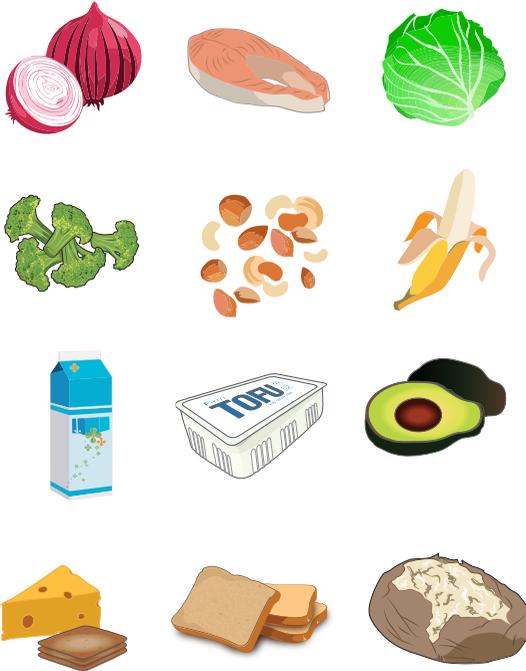


Plan your activities to help conserve your energy.



Tips to manage fatigue:

Try to eat well.



Try doing some light exercise or activity each day.



IMPORTANT: Speak to your treatment team (514-934-8007) if you are feeling very fatigued, depressed, sleepy or having trouble doing everyday things like bathing or cooking.

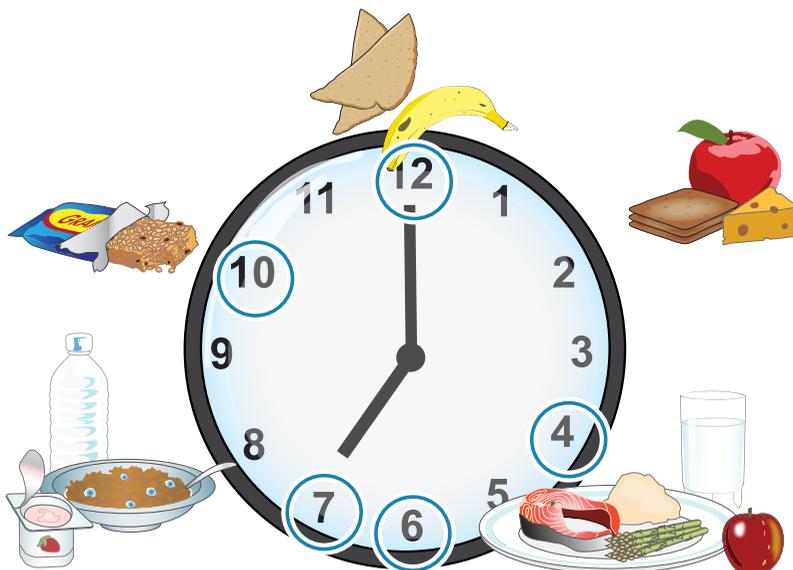
Chemotherapy drugs can cause nausea and vomiting

Your brain has a “Vomiting Centre” which reacts to chemicals or drugs in the blood. When chemotherapy drugs travel through the brain, they will act on the “Vomiting Centre”, making you feel nauseous or causing you to vomit.



Tips to manage nausea and vomiting:

Eat a few dry crackers when you wake up. Choose simple, plain foods. Eat small meals and drink small amounts of clear beverages throughout the day.



Tips to manage nausea and vomiting:

Do not lie down after eating.



Certain medications can help. Speak to your treatment team.



IMPORTANT: Speak to your treatment team (514-934-8007) if:

- You vomit for more than 24 hours.
- You have nausea that lasts for more than 24 hours.

Remember, it is important to speak to your treatment team about your side effects. Side effects can usually be controlled or reduced. There are many medications and strategies that can help. Speak to your treatment team about any problems you are having so they can help you in the best way possible.



