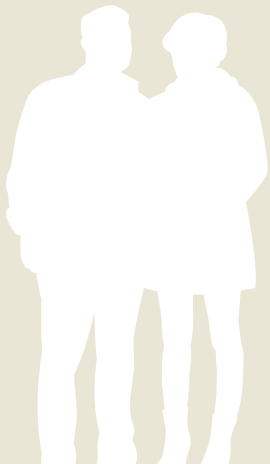




## Managing SIDE EFFECTS



**YOUR LOVED ONE** may experience side effects due to cancer and cancer treatments. Side effects can be either short term or long term. Some side effects happen during treatment. Others can occur after treatment ends. The type and severity of side effects will depend on the specific treatment plan and your loved one's overall health. As a caregiver, there are many ways you can help your loved one to manage treatment side effects—lifestyle changes, nutrition, exercise, and medication.

## Keep a log and track side effects

By tracking your loved one's daily food intake, side effects, timing and well-being, you may be able to determine foods or behaviors that make side effects worse. Once you have figured out what makes your loved one's side effects better or worse, you can adjust accordingly. You can also share the log with the healthcare team. This way, the healthcare team can determine if your loved one needs medication or if a change in dosage will help to reduce the side effects.



Use worksheet:  
*Food Intake and Side-Effects Log*



**Get the LLS Health Manager app**  
Track side effects, medications, food and more!



## Lifestyle changes to manage side effects

Making adjustments to your loved one's daily habits can make the side effects of treatment more manageable and improve his or her quality of life.

### Encourage physical activity.

Exercise can help relieve many of the side effects related to cancer treatment. Exercise can help with digestive problems, pain management, maintaining muscle mass and improving sleep patterns. It may sound counterintuitive, but exercise can also increase the patient's energy levels. Exercise does not need to be strenuous. Even a walk around the block can help. Check with the healthcare team before your loved one begins a new exercise regimen.

### Encourage good dental and mouth care.

A sore mouth, mouth sores and dry mouth are all possible side effects of cancer treatment. Proper oral care helps to manage these symptoms and prevent secondary issues, such as tooth decay. For a sore mouth, ask the doctor about special mouthwashes and sprays that can numb the mouth and throat if the discomfort persists. For a dry mouth, ask the doctor about artificial saliva products, such as rinses and mints that can be purchased over the counter.

Tell the healthcare team if your loved one's gums are bleeding or if your loved one has white patches in the mouth. Both can be signs of infection.

### Suggest loose-fitting clothing.

Clothing that fits tightly around the midsection may aggravate digestive issues and make nausea worse.

### Avoid strong smells or odors in the home.

Strong odors may trigger nausea for some. Avoid using air fresheners, scented candles, perfume or scented cleaning supplies in your loved one's home.



## Food preparation tips to manage side effects

Fatigue, sensitivity to odors, and other side effects may make food preparation difficult for your loved one. Here are some tips to make food preparation easier and help your loved one to manage some of the side effects of treatment.

### **Prepare small, frequent meals throughout the day.**

Your loved one may not have much of an appetite. Eating frequent small meals will help ensure your loved one's body is getting enough calories, protein and nutrients so he or she can tolerate treatment.

- Serve small meals frequently throughout the day for better digestion, fewer stomach upsets, and more energy.
- Use smaller plates and cups to help control portion size.
- Aim for five to six small meals a day or about every 3 hours throughout the day.

### **Ask for requests.**

If you (as a caregiver) are preparing a meal, check with your loved one to see what kinds of food and drink sound good.


- "What can you eat for lunch today to build up your strength?" instead of "What do you want to eat?"
- Try to avoid serving the same thing every day, unless your loved one requests it.

### **Avoid fat.**

Prepare food by baking, slow-cooking, grilling, or broiling to limit fat. Fats can make some digestive issues worse. But, there is an exception! If your loved one needs to gain weight or stop losing weight, add healthy fats and oils to your loved one's food to add extra calories.

### **Eliminate problem foods.**

Certain foods may make your loved one's side effects worse and these foods can differ from person to person. If a certain food item isn't well tolerated, remember to eliminate that food from meals in the future. Foods your loved one may have enjoyed before treatment may cause issues now. For example, some people with cancer experience lactose intolerance as a side effect of treatment. You can determine which foods may be "problem foods" for your loved one by tracking food intake and side effects daily.



**Check the spices to combat changes in taste.**

Changes in taste and smell are common side effects of cancer treatment. Check in with your loved one. You may need to adjust or change spices to adapt to changing tastes. If your loved one complains of a metallic taste, switch to plastic utensils and plates.

**Keep aromas to a minimum.**


- Sensitivity to smells or odors is another side effect of cancer treatment.
- If odor is an issue, cook while the patient is out of the house or asleep.
  - Use fans to move food aromas and cooking smells out of the kitchen and house.
  - A small personal fan at the dinner table may help.
  - Prepare cold meals like sandwiches, fruit and cheese plates, crackers with peanut butter and celery, and smoothies.
  - Use cups with lids and straws.

**Plan meals in advance.**

- Friends and family members may want to help prepare meals.
- Keep a list on the refrigerator of who is bringing what and when.
  - Label prepared foods with an “eat-by” date.
  - You can also use online resources to help with meal planning and coordination.

**Sip liquids between meals.**

Staying hydrated is important, so encourage your loved one to sip liquids between meals, but to stop drinking 30 minutes before a meal or snack to build an appetite. Drinking too much at a meal, especially low-calorie beverages, can replace vital nutrient-dense foods, such as meat, vegetables and fruits. Limit drinks with meals so that more solid foods with calories can be consumed.




**Add iron-rich foods to meals if your loved one has anemia.**

- Anemia is caused by low numbers of red blood cells. The healthcare team will tell you if your loved one is anemic.
- Often times anemia has no obvious symptoms, but symptoms can include fatigue, shortness of breath, dizziness and pale skin.
  - Iron-rich foods include: liver, beef, chicken, pork loin, salmon, clams, and oysters.
  - Non-meat foods that are a good source of iron include fortified cereals, lentils, pumpkin seeds, spinach, kidney beans, tofu, and raisins.
  - Avoid coffee and tea at mealtimes because they can interfere with iron absorption.
  - Do not provide an iron supplement without checking with the healthcare team.

**Serve moist foods if your loved one has difficulty swallowing.**

Moist foods are the easiest to swallow. Foods with moisture, such as tomatoes, applesauce, canned fruits, cooked vegetables, gelatin, soups, puddings and ice cream all provide water. So, your loved won't need a big glass of water with the meal. Moist foods also require less cutting and chewing, which conserves energy to eat the rest of the prepared food.



**Prepare smoothies, shakes, or liquid nutrition supplements to add calories and protein.**

Liquids can be easier to consume than solid foods. Smoothies or shakes can serve as a small-meal replacement. Premade liquid nutrition supplements are available at grocery and drug stores. Ask a registered dietitian which type is best for your loved one. If your loved one is not eating well or losing weight, add ingredients that provide calories and protein, such as whole milk, powdered milk, protein powder, peanut butter, ice cream or yogurt to smoothies, shakes or liquid nutrition supplements.

**Choose cold foods to soothe a sore mouth or throat.**

Popsicles, frozen fruit, or flavored ice can offer relief if your loved one is suffering from a sore mouth or throat. Popsicles also help with hydration and count toward daily fluid intake. Include foods that promote healthy bowel function.

**Add foods with fiber if they are well tolerated.**

Gradually increase fiber intake to 25 to 35 grams daily. High-fiber foods include whole grains, beans, lentils, and the skins of fruits and vegetables. To relieve constipation, choose high-fiber foods and encourage your loved one to drink plenty of water. You can also try offering plum or prune juice.

Do not give your loved one medication for constipation without first checking with the healthcare team.

**Choose food and drinks carefully if your loved one experiences diarrhea.**

Avoid high-fiber, spicy, fried, and high-fat foods. Choose white rice, applesauce, cooked vegetables and low-fat meat and dairy instead. To stay hydrated, your loved one should drink lots of clear liquids, such as water, ginger ale, sports drinks or electrolyte-replacement drinks.

**Call the healthcare team if your loved one experiences severe diarrhea.**

Do not give anti-diarrheal medications without checking with the healthcare team. Use pictures of food to stimulate appetite if your loved one doesn't want to eat. Seeing food advertisements and magazine pictures can help to stimulate the appetite or trigger memories of good meals. Share your magazines or grocery store ads with your loved one and use them to brainstorm meal ideas.

**Be sociable during mealtimes.**

Meals are only healthy and nutritious if your loved one consumes them.

- Making mealtimes social times that are relaxing and fun can help improve appetite and make unpleasant side effects more bearable.
- Your loved one should stay sitting up after meals to reduce heartburn and reflux.
- Enjoy sharing meals with your loved one and talk about something other than treatments and meal preparation.

**TIP**

Take snacks for your loved one and for yourself with you when you have a long appointment or on treatment days. Use an insulated lunch bag with an ice pack for refrigerated items. Don't forget bottles of water so that you can both stay hydrated.

## Neutropenia and diet

Neutropenia is a common side effect of chemotherapy and increases a person's risk of infection. It is a condition when the blood has lower-than-normal count of neutrophils (a type of white blood cell). If your loved one has neutropenia, the doctor may recommend special food guidelines. The guidelines is meant to help you protect your loved one from bacteria and other harmful organisms found in some food and drinks. If your loved one has had a stem cell transplantation, his or her diet restrictions may be stricter than those of someone who has had chemotherapy or radiation therapy and no transplant.

Food guidelines for a person who is immunosuppressed vary among cancer centres. Ask members of your loved one's healthcare team for any special instructions.



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