

# Patient Education

for Cancer Related Treatment

*There is something infinitely healing in the repeated  
refrains of nature - that assurance that dawn  
comes after night, and spring after winter.*

—Rachel Carson

■ ■ SAINT BARNABAS □  
■ ■ HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

*New Jersey's Health Care Leader* □





Dear Patients and Family Members,

While the diagnosis of cancer is overwhelming, there are many treatment options. The volumes of written information, as important as they may be, tend to accumulate and can often be confusing. Even if you have read everything, when a problem occurs it is often difficult to sort out its importance and in which pamphlet, book or sheet of paper the solution can be found.

This booklet is designed to be a clear, concise reference. Within the hospitals that make up the Saint Barnabas Health Care System, we feel that it is important for you and your family to understand your diagnosis, your treatment and your recovery. With this knowledge, potential side effects may be avoided altogether, and those that do occur may be easier to manage.

We also understand that there may be times when you are simply unable to read or recall all of the information you are receiving. Our nurses are always available to answer any question that you may have. Please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,



Nancy E. Holecek, BSN, RN, CNA  
Senior Vice President for Patient Care Services

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## Radiation Therapy

### □ *What is Radiation Therapy?*

Radiation therapy is the use of high-energy x-rays to kill cancer cells. There are two types of radiation, external radiation and internal radiation. External radiation treatments are given through a large x-ray type machine. Internal radiation comes from a substance implanted in the body such as a seed. Radiation treatments can be given directly to the area of tumor or disease. When radiation is given to these areas, cancer cells are killed and the tumor shrinks.

One goal of radiation is to cure your cancer. In this situation, radiation is often given before or after surgery, and in combination with chemotherapy. Your radiation oncology doctor will work with you as well as with a team of other medical professionals to decide which combination and sequence will work best for you.

Radiation therapy is very helpful to many patients, even when a cure from cancer is not possible. Radiation can be used to shrink tumors enough to reduce pain and to improve your quality of life. If you are not sure why you are receiving radiation, or have any questions, please ask us to explain.

### □ *What is External Beam Radiation Therapy?*

External beam radiation therapy is a very common type of radiation treatment. This treatment is given by using a large machine that looks similar to an x-ray machine. This machine produces energy beams that are directed specifically at the tumor. Before this treatment takes place, your body will be measured with x-ray or computed tomography (CT) scanning machines. These machines help the radiation doctor and radiation therapist plan your course of radiation treatments. The planning process is called *simulation*. Simulation usually takes one to two sessions, and can last anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours. During simulation, the radiation therapist will mark areas of your skin with small tattoos or markings. If you notice that these areas start to fade, please let your radiation therapist know, so that they can keep them dark enough to find. After your treatment is complete, these areas will be removed or will fade.

Once simulation has been done, your doctor will decide how much radiation is needed, or how many treatments you will need to have. Usually radiation treatments are given once a day, Monday through Friday, and take about fifteen minutes. There may be some



waiting time involved to allow the staff to set up the machine and other equipment for you. The process is usually painless. You do not see nor feel the radiation x-rays. However, if you feel pain or pressure from lying still or lying a certain way, speak to your doctor. He or she can prescribe medication that you can take before each treatment.


Depending on the treatment area, you may need to undress and remove jewelry. Wearing loose fitting clothing is always best. You will be asked to lie down on a table and then will be positioned under the machine. The radiation therapist may put special shields or blocks on your body that help the machines to target a certain area only. Once you are positioned correctly, the radiation therapist will go into a nearby room to turn the machine on and to monitor you on a closed circuit television. You can talk to the therapist at any time through an intercom. The machine will make some noises. Some people say that it sounds like a vacuum cleaner. The machine will move around you at different angles as controlled by the radiation therapist. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the treatment, tell the therapist. The machine can be stopped at any time.

### ❑ *What is Internal Radiation Therapy?*

Internal radiation therapy, also called brachytherapy, gives a very large dose of radiation directly to the area of tumor. This dose may be given one time or several times over a series of weeks. There are different ways that the internal radiation can be delivered. Some of the methods include:

- ◆ Radiation therapy seeds can be implanted directly into the area of the tumor through a small catheter or tube. Once the seeds are delivered, the catheter or tube is then removed.
- ◆ A radiation source can be implanted through a cylinder inserted into the area of tumor. Once the source is delivered, the cylinder is then removed.
- ◆ A solution of radiation therapy medication can be infused directly into your bloodstream through a vein.

There are different types of internal radiation therapy. Some of these are cesium, iridium or iodine.



Internal radiation may be given in combination with external radiation. It may be given in the radiation department or sometimes, as common with prostate treatments, in the operating room. You may be able to go home that same day. However, in some cases, you will be required to stay in the hospital.

There are special precautions that must be taken if you have the type of internal radiation that requires you to stay in the hospital. There are types of internal radiation which may require that you are isolated in order to protect others from exposure to radiation. Your doctor or nurse will explain all of the necessary precautions to you. Examples of some precautions are:

- ◆ the time that visitors spend with you may be limited
- ◆ there may be a specific distance that visitors must maintain between you and themselves
- ◆ you may be asked to stay in your room
- ◆ lead shielding may be placed around your bed
- ◆ linens and trash may need to be disposed of in specially marked bins in your room
- ◆ dishes and eating utensils may be disposable and need to be discarded after use in the specially marked bin in your room.

These restrictions usually only last a couple of days. The degree of restriction is different for everyone, and you will be directed as to what will be best for you.

Like external radiation therapy, internal radiation treatments are painless. However, the apparatus used to deliver internal radiation treatments may cause you discomfort. You will be monitored closely during the time that you will be receiving these treatments. Your doctor may order pain medications to assure your comfort. You will be having blood work drawn as well. If you have questions at any time, or are experiencing any side effects from treatment, please let your doctor or nurse know.

### ***What Are the Side Effects of Radiation Therapy?***

Side effects of radiation therapy will vary from one person to another. The treatments are generally well tolerated by most. Often the greatest side effect from radiation therapy is fatigue. People often feel more tired as treatment goes on. Be sure to speak to your doctor or nurse about what you can do to help improve fatigue.



### **Common side effects include:**

- ◆ Skin changes at the site of therapy can be common with radiation treatment. The color of your skin may change from the treatment. These effects can be temporary or permanent. The radiation doctor and radiation therapist work to limit the amount of normal cells that get affected by the radiation. Sometimes normal cells do receive small doses of the radiation. Please let your doctor or nurse know right away if you experience any redness, stinging, or pain on your body. They can give you something to help the pain, or hold a treatment or treatments to let your body recover.
- ◆ Hair loss will occur only in the area where you are getting radiation. For example, if you are getting radiation to your head, you may lose hair in that area.
- ◆ Nausea and vomiting or diarrhea may occur if you are getting radiation treatment to the stomach area. If you experience any of these symptoms, please let your doctor or nurse know. There are medications you can take to help you with these symptoms.
- ◆ Loss of appetite may interfere with eating or digestion. Proper nutrition is very important to the healing process. You can speak with a dietician about nutrition concerns. Please mention it to your doctor or nurse.
- ◆ Dry mouth may occur, especially if you are receiving treatment to your head or neck.
- ◆ Difficulty breathing, swallowing or coughing may occur if you are receiving radiation to the chest. You can discuss these side effects with your doctor or nurse.

Also discuss any sexual concerns with your doctor or nurse. There are few restrictions where sexual intercourse is concerned, but there may be fertility issues.

It also must be mentioned that there are emotional side effects to consider. It is not unusual to feel anxious, depressed, afraid or angry during treatment. You are not alone. The important thing to remember is to talk to your doctor or nurse about these feelings. They can help point you in the direction of help.



## Introduction to Chemotherapy

### **❑ *What is chemotherapy?***

Chemotherapy (chemo) is the use of chemicals (medications) to treat cancer. The way chemo works is that it destroys cancer cells. Often, more than one chemical is used in each treatment. Other treatments that may be used along with chemo are: radiation therapy, surgery, hormone therapy, or therapy with biologic agents. How your cancer is treated depends on the type of cancer and your overall health.

There are many chemo medications for your doctor to choose from. Chemo can be given in many different forms. Usually chemo is given in liquid form right into your veins. Some types of chemo may come in pill form. For some cancers, chemo can be given directly into the spine, brain, lungs, heart or stomach.

### **❑ *How will my doctor decide what chemo is right for me?***

Once your doctor decides what type of cancer you have, the stage it is in, and your state of health, the best treatment plan for you will be decided. You should not compare your treatment plan to the treatment plan of someone you know who also has cancer. Each treatment plan is based on individual needs.

If you are going to be getting chemo, your doctor will determine which chemo is best for you. He or she will decide how often you will have to get the chemo, and whether or not you will have to come into the hospital or if you can be treated as an outpatient. Your doctor or nurse will talk to you about the medicines you will be getting as well as any possible side effects before your treatments start.

If your doctor decides that you will need other kinds of treatment for your cancer, such as surgery or radiation therapy, we will help you schedule your chemo around the other treatments.

If you are taking any medications, including vitamins, herbs and other “over-the-counter” drugs, you must let your doctor know before you start receiving chemo-therapy. Sometimes these other drugs may change the effects of the chemotherapy, or may cause the side effects of chemotherapy to be worse. Your doctor will tell you which medications you may continue taking and which ones to stop based on your situation.



### *Will I have side effects from the chemo?*

Some people do have side effects from chemo. The reason side effects occur is that as the chemo is destroying the cancer cells, it is also destroying some of your healthy cells. The chemo cannot distinguish between cancer cells and healthy cells. If you have known someone who has suffered from the side effects of chemo, you might be afraid that this will happen to you. Remember, everyone responds to chemotherapy differently. You may not have the same side effects as someone else. Also, there are drugs to decrease the possible side effects of chemotherapy, and new ones are being developed every day. If you do have side effects, the nurses will help you cope with them through medication, education and emotional support.

The chemo you will be getting will not hurt any of the people around you. You do not have to avoid children and you do not have to stop working. There may be periods of time that you need to avoid people with contagious illnesses. Your doctor or nurse will inform you of when special precautions are necessary. If your employer has any questions, you may refer them to the American Cancer Society.

### *How will I know if the chemo is working?*

There are many ways to tell if your chemotherapy is working. Your doctor may order blood tests, x-rays, and various types of scans to evaluate your progress. Your doctor will keep you well informed of your test results. If you do not completely understand what those results mean, please ask your doctor or one of the nurses to explain further.

## Intravenous Access

### ❑ *What is Intravenous Access?*

Many of the chemotherapy drugs (chemo) are liquids that must be given directly into your blood stream. Intravenous access (IV access) means that some type of catheter or tube will be placed in one of your veins so that your chemotherapy (chemo) can be given directly into your blood stream.

There are two kinds of IV access – peripheral IV access and central venous access. In peripheral IV access, a small catheter is placed in one of the veins in your arm or hand. Chemotherapy is frequently given in this way. Because some of the chemo drugs can be very irritating to your veins, it is sometimes better to use a vein that is large in size so that it will not become irritated. These large veins are found close to the heart. Placing a catheter for IV access into one of these large veins is called central venous access. Your doctor may speak to you about having a central venous access device inserted for your chemotherapy treatments.

### ❑ *How will my doctor decide what kind of IV access is best for me?*



The kind of IV access that is best for you will be based on the kind of chemo drugs you will be given, how long you will be getting chemo, and the overall condition of your veins. If you have been having a lot of blood drawn, or have been receiving IV medications, the veins in your arms and hands may not be best for chemo treatments. In this case, your doctor may recommend that you get your chemo drugs through a central venous access device.

The kind of central venous access device that is most often used for giving chemo drugs is called a port-a-cath. The port-a-cath is placed directly under your skin, in a short surgical procedure.



The port-a-cath is used by inserting a needle through the skin into the port. Once the needle is in, you can be given medications, or blood samples can be taken without you having to insert another needle. Once the needle is put into the port-a-cath, you will not feel it. It will be taped down so that it does not come out accidentally. The needle is removed when your treatment is completed. Your nurse or doctor will teach you and/or your family about care of the port-a-cath when it is not being used for chemo.



## Side Effects

### ❑ *What are side effects?*

Chemotherapy and radiation therapy can affect normal cells along with the cancer cells. Side effects are unpleasant symptoms that people sometimes get because the cancer treatment is affecting their normal cells, as well as the cancer cells.

### ❑ *Will I have side effects?*

Everyone reacts to cancer treatment in a different way. You may know of people who have had treatment for cancer and have had some of the common side effects – vomiting, nausea, tiredness, hair loss. The side effects you may have depend on the kind of treatment you are given, and your individual response. Some people have very minor side effects that are just annoying. Others may have more severe side effects. Many of the side effects that you may experience are temporary. This means that you will not continue to have those side effects once all of the treatments are finished.

### ❑ *What are some of the side effects that I might have?*

Some of the most common side effects are:

- ◆ Anemia – some cancer treatments can decrease the red blood cells which help to give you energy
- ◆ Bleeding – some cancer treatments affect the platelets in your blood, which help to prevent you from bleeding
- ◆ Infection – some cancer treatments affect the white blood cells which help to fight infection
- ◆ Nausea and vomiting
- ◆ Hair loss
- ◆ Fatigue / tiredness
- ◆ Sores in the mouth (stomatitis)
- ◆ Diarrhea or constipation

These and a few other possible side effects will be discussed in detail in the next few pages of this booklet.



❑ ***What if I have side effects?***

There are many medications available to help you deal with side effects. You may be given some medications before and after your treatment to help prevent or manage side effects. For example, there are medications that ease nausea and vomiting. There are medications to help manage the tiredness that treatment can cause, and the diarrhea or constipation. If you are taking some of these medications to help prevent or ease side effects and they are not working, please let your doctor or nurse know so they can try something else.

## Bone Marrow Effects:

### *Anemia*

#### *What is anemia?*

Bone marrow is found inside the long bones of the body, and in the hip bones. Red blood cells are made in the bone marrow. Red blood cells carry the oxygen that we breathe to all parts of the body. Some chemo drugs and radiation therapy stop the bone marrow from making enough red blood cells. When we don't have enough red blood cells, we become anemic, or we have anemia. This side effect is less common in patients who are treated with radiation therapy only.

Before each episode of chemotherapy, and periodically during radiation therapy, blood work will be done to check for anemia. This test is called a CBC (complete blood count).

#### *What are the signs of anemia?*

Some of the signs and symptoms of anemia are:

- ◆ Tiredness
- ◆ Shortness of breath
- ◆ Weakness
- ◆ Dizziness
- ◆ Chills
- ◆ Pounding in the head
- ◆ Ringing in the ears

#### *What can be done about anemia?*

Your doctor will decide what treatment, if any, is best for you based on your physical condition and the result of your CBC.

There are medications that can be given to you to help your body make more red blood cells.

Your doctor may give you a blood transfusion of red blood cells to help boost the number of red blood cells in your body.



□ ***Points to remember***

It is important for you to tell your doctor or nurse if you are having any of the signs of anemia listed so they can decide if you need treatment.

Some things you can do to help yourself feel better if you have anemia are:

- ◆ Get plenty of rest
- ◆ Limit your activities – get the most important things done first
- ◆ Eat a well balanced diet
- ◆ Get up slowly from a sitting or lying down position
- ◆ Ask for help from family and friends with such things as shopping, housework, child care, etc.

## Bone Marrow Effects:

### Bleeding

#### *What is bleeding?*

Bone marrow is found inside the long bones of the body, and in the hip bones. Platelets are made in the bone marrow. Platelets are blood cells that help prevent bleeding. When your body does not have enough platelets, you may bleed or bruise more easily than usual, even from a minor cut or injury. Some chemo drugs and radiation therapy stop the bone marrow from making enough platelets. This side effect is less common in patients who are treated with radiation therapy only.

Before each chemo treatment, and periodically during radiation therapy, a sample of your blood will be taken to check for the number of platelets. This test is called a CBC (complete blood count).

#### *What are the signs and symptoms of bleeding?*

Some of the signs and symptoms of bleeding are:

- ◆ Unexpected bruising or bleeding
- ◆ Small red spots under the skin
- ◆ Red or pink urine
- ◆ Black stools (bowel movements)

#### *What can be done about the bleeding?*

Your doctor will decide what treatment, if any, is best for you based on your physical condition and the result of your CBC.

There is a medication available that may help your body make more platelets. This medication is not used for everyone with a low platelet count. Your doctor will decide if this might be helpful for you.

Your doctor may order a platelet transfusion to help boost the number of platelets in your body.



□ ***Points to remember***

It is important to tell your doctor or nurse if you are having any of the side effects listed so they can decide if you need treatment.

Some things you can do to help yourself if you have low platelets and bleeding are:

- ◆ Avoid alcohol and aspirin or aspirin containing products such as Motrin®, or Advil®
- ◆ Use a soft toothbrush to clean your teeth and do not floss
- ◆ Use an electric shaver
- ◆ Avoid blowing your nose or sneezing forcefully
- ◆ Do not have dental work or any surgery without talking to your oncologist
- ◆ Report any signs of bleeding to your nurse or doctor
- ◆ Check with your doctor before taking any “over-the-counter” medications or herbal remedies.

## Bone Marrow Effects

### Infection / Neutropenia

#### ❑ *What is infection / neutropenia?*

Bone marrow is found inside the long bones of the body, and in the hip bones. White blood cells are made in the bone marrow. White blood cells allow the body to fight infection. When the number of white blood cells is low, this is called neutropenia. If you have neutropenia, you are at risk to develop infections. Some chemo drugs and radiation therapy stop the bone marrow from making enough white blood cells. This side effect is less common in patients who are treated with radiation therapy only.

Before each chemo treatment, and periodically during radiation therapy, a sample of your blood will be taken to check for the number of white blood cells. This test is called a CBC (complete blood count).

#### ❑ *What are the signs and symptoms of infection / neutropenia?*

Some of the signs and symptoms of infection / neutropenia are:

- ◆ Fever / chills
- ◆ Sore throat
- ◆ Coughing
- ◆ Burning on urination
- ◆ Redness, swelling or pain around a wound, sore, pimple or intravenous catheter site
- ◆ Diarrhea

#### ❑ *What can be done about infection / neutropenia?*

Your doctor will decide what treatment, if any, is best for you based on your physical condition and the result of your CBC.

There is a medication available that may be able to help your body make more white blood cells. This medication is not used for everyone with a low white blood cell count. Your doctor will decide if it might be helpful for you.

Your doctor may decide to hold off on your chemo or decrease the dose temporarily until your white blood count returns to normal.



□ ***Points to remember:***

It is important for you to tell your doctor or nurse if you are having any of the side effects listed so they can decide if you need treatment.

Some of the things you can do to help yourself if you have neutropenia are:

- ◆ Frequent hand washing especially before meals and after toileting
- ◆ Take a warm bath, shower or sponge bath every day
- ◆ Pat the skin dry – do not rub
- ◆ Practice good oral hygiene
- ◆ Clean your perineal and rectal area well, daily and as needed
- ◆ Avoid crowds or people with known infections
- ◆ Avoid handling pets, cleaning litter boxes and bird cages or coming in contact with animal droppings
- ◆ Avoid handling fresh flowers or live plants
- ◆ Use an electric shaver instead of a razor to prevent breaks or cuts in your skin
- ◆ Use lotion to soften and heal your skin if it becomes dry or cracked

## Loss of Appetite: How to Maintain Good Nutrition

### ❑ *What happened to your appetite?*

Losing your appetite is a common complaint when you are having cancer treatment. Cancer treatments that destroy cancer cells can also harm cells that are important to eating enjoyment, digestion, and appetite. Chemotherapy and radiation can cause nausea, sore throat or mouth sores, difficulty swallowing, a change in the taste of food, diarrhea, or constipation. And sometimes you may feel too tired to cook or eat. All of these problems can make us lose our appetites. Being nervous, anxious and stressed about your disease also can take away your appetite.

### ❑ *What is so important about eating?*

Good nutrition helps you to fight the cancer itself, tolerate your chemotherapy or other treatments better, and to repair the damage that the treatment does to the other parts of your body. Right now your body needs extra protein and more calories than usual to heal, regain strength, and restore your body to the best that it can be. Good nutrition is the CORNERSTONE of cancer therapy – it's as important as your chemotherapy and radiation!

### ❑ *What can be done to help your appetite and give your body extra nutrition?*

Here are some helpful hints that make it easier to eat and maintain good nutrition:

- ◆ Pre-planning can help – set the right atmosphere
  - Prepare (or buy) your favorite dishes. Have foods in the house that look and smell good to you.
  - Prepare favorite dishes on the days when you feel good so that you just need to heat them up on the days when you may not feel as good.
  - If cooking is not for you, use the pre-frozen meals (frozen dinners) that you like and that only require heating up.
  - Cook outdoors if smells bother you; or better yet, get someone else to cook while you stay out of the kitchen until the meal is on the table.

## Loss of Appetite: How to Maintain Good Nutrition

- Make your food look appealing – pretty plates, garnishes, good company and a quiet, pleasant dining table create a nice setting for your meals.
- Make your food taste appealing - tangy, flavorful seasonings and condiments can stimulate your taste buds.
- Even the temperature of your foods can make them easier to eat: food can be served warm instead of hot or at room temperature, if that feels good to you.
- Some people find that cold foods are the easiest to tolerate when you do not feel like eating.
- At mealtime or snack time, settle yourself in your favorite spot to eat ... enjoy the occasion; take time to relax during and after your meals.
- If you have a metallic taste in your mouth, use plastic knives, forks and spoons instead of silver or stainless steel.
- Tell others not to nag you about your eating habits, food choices or your weight changes.

### ◆ Prepare your body (and listen to your body)

- This is your opportunity to eat whatever you like, whenever you like it, and as much as you like. Eat LOTS of what you like! (A dieter's dream come true!)
- Don't wait for mealtimes; eat every time you are hungry, even a little-bit hungry. Healthy snacks can really add much-needed protein and calories.
- Eat LOTS on your good days when your appetite is at its best.
- You may want to avoid eating your very favorite foods right before you are having a chemotherapy treatment so that you continue to like those foods.
- Regular exercise, even mild exercise like a stroll outside, can make you feel better all over and encourage your appetite.
- There are medications that can stimulate your appetite; if your appetite is poor, do talk to your physician or nurse about prescribing a medication that can help you.

## Loss of Appetite: How to Maintain Good Nutrition

- ◆ Choose foods carefully for added nutrition
  - Milk shakes, gravies, sauces, grated cheeses and yogurt all add calories to your meals.
  - Drinking small amounts of liquids like Hi-C or Gatorade will moisten your mouth and throat. Ice chips, ice pops and frozen juices are also good as between-meal moisteners.
  - Soft foods are easy to eat and can be full of protein and calories: eggs, macaroni and cheese, creamy cereals, cream soups, extra butter in cooking, custards.
  - Snacks are important sources of nutrition: peanut butter, nuts, juices, puddings, flavored milks, cheese, cookies and dips.
  - Hard candies and fresh fruits can help take away a bad taste in your mouth.
  - You may want to avoid tart, citrus fruits, very spicy, salty or greasy foods and focus instead on bananas, sherbet, applesauce and watermelon that are easy to chew and swallow.
  
- ◆ Care for yourself after meals and between meals
  - Rinse your mouth with warm, slightly-salted water after meals and at bedtime.
  - Stay upright (don't lie down flat) right after eating to help digestion.
  - Use a lip salve often to prevent dry, cracked lips.
  - Use a soft toothbrush and brush gently.
  - Drink liquids between meals to keep the mouth moist.
  - If you become constipated, remember to add more liquids, more fruit, whole-grain cereals, salads and roughage (fiber) to the diet.

## Loss of Appetite: How to Maintain Good Nutrition

### ❑ *What are “dietary supplements” ?*

Dietary supplements are prepared products (often in cans or in powder form) that you can eat or drink (similar to a milk shake) to provide extra nutrition for your body. They come in different brands (examples: Prosure, Ensure, Sustacal, Carnation Instant Breakfast and more) and in many different flavors.

### ❑ *Do you need a dietary supplement?*

When your body cannot get enough nutrition from a regular diet and snacks, then it might be time to add some extra calories and protein by using Dietary Supplements. A doctor or dietitian can guide you and give you advice about your nutritional status. The doctor or dietitian can tell you if and when you need a supplement, and can guide you to the right one based on your own nutritional needs.

## Nausea and Vomiting

### ❑ *What causes nausea and vomiting?*

We all have an area in our brain that is called the “vomiting center.” Some types of chemo and radiation therapy irritate the vomiting center and can cause nausea and vomiting. Also, sometimes the chemo drugs irritate the mouth, throat, stomach and lining of the intestine which can cause nausea. Radiation therapy can cause these effects when the radiation beam is aimed at these areas of the body.

The nausea and vomiting can begin at any time after you start treatment, and can last after the treatment is finished.

### ❑ *What can be done about nausea and vomiting?*


#### ◆ Medications for nausea and vomiting:

- There are medications that you can take before your treatment, during your treatment and /or after. There are some medications that you can take at home if you are nauseous or vomiting. Some of these drugs can be given directly into your IV access, others you can take by mouth or by rectum. You and your doctor will decide what medicine is best for you to relieve your nausea and vomiting.
- One or more drugs may be given to you prior to your treatment to prevent nausea and vomiting, and will be available during your treatment in the hospital. Your doctor will provide you with a prescription for taking medication at home, as needed, to manage nausea and vomiting that may occur after your treatment. Your medication should be taken as soon as nausea begins in order for it to be most effective.

#### ◆ Eating hints to help with nausea and vomiting:

There are some things that you can do with your diet in order to ease the nausea and vomiting that you may be feeling.

- Have small frequent meals and snacks if you are feeling nauseous
- Drink liquids between meals to make sure your body has enough liquids
- At meals, food is most important; limit liquids
- Eat foods that have a lot of calories in them in order to obtain more calories in a smaller amount of food (i.e. add gravies & cheese sauces to meats & vegetables).
- Limit high fat foods that delay stomach emptying if they cause you to feel full early

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- Eat with friends or family as it may help to take your mind off the difficulties of eating
  - Cold or room temperature foods decrease aroma which can be related to nausea
  - Rest after eating; avoid excessive movement and exercise
  - Avoid gagging activities (mouth care, pills) immediately after eating
  - If solids are not possible, milk shakes, cocoa, floats, chocolate milk, juice, and soups can make a meal

◆ Problems with eating may be helped by:

- Rinsing your mouth with a solution of warm salt water after meals and at bedtime
- Drinking small amounts of fluids with meals to rinse away bad tastes: Hi-C, Koolaid or Gatorade are well tolerated
- Using plastic utensils and glass or plastic cooking containers if you notice a metallic taste while eating
- Eating hard candies and fresh fruits to eliminate bad taste
- Choosing moist foods, adding sauces/gravies as desired
- Using tart substances such as lemon juice or suck on hard candies to stimulate production of saliva
- Sucking on ice chips keeps the mouth lubricated

◆ Helpful hints with mouth or throat sores:

- Eat a liquid diet, milk shakes, blenderized food
- Serve foods at room temperature, not hot
- Eat soft foods
- Use gravies/sauces to moisten dry foods
- Use fruit flavor juices (i.e. Hi-C, Gatorade) rather than citrus juices (i.e. orange juice, pineapple juice) which have acid in them
- Drink through a straw to bypass mouth sores
- Brush and rinse with salt or baking soda in warm water (avoid commercial mouth washes that contain alcohol)
- Use a soft tooth brush – or gently swab your mouth if you are unable to use a tooth brush
- Avoid citrus fruits, pickles, spices, alcohol, tobacco



◆ Dietary Supplements:

- Your body needs a certain amount of calories each day. Add calories to the foods you like and can eat (for example, add cheese to scrambled eggs; add margarine, cheese or cream sauces to cooked vegetables).
- There are dietary supplements that are already prepared or can be easily prepared at home. Some of these include: Prosure, Carnation Instant Breakfast, Ensure, and Sustacal. You should experiment with different flavors and products until you find one that you like.
- There are medications that your doctor can prescribe to increase your appetite if needed.

◆ Other Tips:

- Remember that your medications for nausea and vomiting should be taken as soon as the nausea begins in order for them to be most effective.
- Some chemo drugs may cause you to retain fluid. The symptoms of fluid retention are swelling or puffiness in the face, hands, feet or abdomen. If you see that you are retaining fluids, try to avoid adding salt to your cooking or your foods. Read labels and avoid prepared food with high sodium content.



## Alopecia

### *What is alopecia?*

Alopecia is the loss of hair. Hair loss will depend on:

- the type of chemo or radiation therapy treatment
- the dose of the chemo drug and how it is given
- the area of the body being radiated

Not everyone who receives treatment for cancer will lose his or her hair. Some drugs cause only thinning of the hair which is often not even noticed by other people. Radiation therapy will cause hair loss only in the area of the body being radiated.

The hair on the head is the hair that is most often lost, but you may also lose hair on your face, arms, legs, underarms, and in your pubic area.

### *If I lose my hair, will my hair grow back?*

Hair loss may start 2-3 weeks after your first dose of chemo. The full effect of the hair loss may not be seen until 1-2 months after treatment. This is not permanent. Hair loss with radiation therapy may start soon after treatment begins and may be permanent.

Some people will see their hair begin to grow back during treatment. Your scalp may become tender and hair that is growing back may become dull, dry and thin. The new hair may be different from the hair that you lost.

The color of your hair comes from pigments, or colors, in your cells. Until the pigment in your cells returns to normal, your new hair may be a different color, white, or gray. The original color of your hair should return as the pigment returns to your cells. Your hair texture should also return to normal over time.



### ❑ *What can I do about alopecia?*

Here are some things for you to consider if you think you may lose your hair, or you begin to lose your hair:

- ◆ If you want to buy a wig, try to do this as soon as possible. It is much easier for the wig stylist to match the color and texture of your hair to a wig when it is all intact. (Custom made wigs and hair prosthetics may take from 6 weeks to 4 months to be made for you and delivered to you.)
- ◆ If hair loss begins prior to your appointment with a wig stylist, save a sample of your hair and take it with you.
- ◆ If a custom wig is too expensive, consider purchasing a less expensive wig and having it professionally styled. Most salons offer this type of service.
- ◆ If you have long hair, you might want to consider getting a shorter cut. This way, the hair loss won't be so easily noticed.
- ◆ In addition to or instead of buying a wig, consider scarves, turbans and hats to conceal hair loss.
- ◆ When combing your own hair use a soft-bristle brush or a wide-toothed comb.
- ◆ Use a gentle pH-balanced shampoo and mild hair conditioners.
- ◆ Try not to use hair dryers, hot rollers, and curling irons because they may damage your hair and scalp, or make the hair loss worse. If you have to use them, use a low heat setting.
- ◆ Do not bleach or dye your hair, and do not get a permanent. All of these can make your hair brittle and may cause damage to your scalp or cause your hair to fall out faster. You may use a color rinse on your hair.
- ◆ Treat yourself to a satin pillowcase. This tends to cause less friction on your head and reduces tangles.



- ◆ If you lose your eyelashes, consider false eyelashes.
- ◆ Some insurance companies cover the cost of buying wigs and other hair prosthetics (scarves, hats, turbans, false eyelashes) that are needed because of cancer treatments. Be sure to check your insurance policy and ask your doctor or nurse for a prescription for these items.
- ◆ If you are unable to afford to purchase a wig, contact your local American Cancer Society. They often have wigs available at little or no cost.
- ◆ Some people choose to have their head totally shaved when hair begins to fall out in order to control the hair loss, as well as to avoid hair falling out when in public. For some, baldness may be more attractive than spotty hair loss.
- ◆ Remember to cover your head in the summer to prevent sunburn and in the winter to prevent heat loss. Protect all areas of your body that have hair loss by using sun screening lotions and clothing.
- ◆ Using an unscented moisturizing cream can prevent your scalp from drying out.

Losing the hair on your head, face and body can be very hard to accept. Remember that this is only temporary. There are support groups that can help you cope with this part of your treatment. What is important is to do what you are comfortable with and what is right for you.

## Fatigue

### ❑ *What is fatigue?*

Fatigue is when you feel tired, listless and have no energy. People who are having cancer treatments often feel fatigue. Fatigue can affect the way you think as well as the way you feel.

The amount and kind of fatigue you may have will depend on the kind of treatment you are getting. Everyone's fatigue is different.

### ❑ *What can be done about fatigue.*

Some of the things you can do to cope with fatigue are:

- ◆ Plan your day with frequent rest periods.
- ◆ Take short naps rather than long naps.
- ◆ Try easier or shorter versions of the activities you enjoy.
- ◆ Eat as well as you can and drink plenty of fluids.
- ◆ Try activities that are less strenuous such as listening to music or reading.
- ◆ If possible, take a short walk or do light exercise.
- ◆ Keep a diary of how you feel each day. This will help you plan your daily activities.
- ◆ Save your energy for the most important things you want to do each day.
- ◆ Become comfortable sharing with others some of the things that you normally do.
- ◆ Find activities that you enjoy and make you feel less tired, and make those activities a priority.
- ◆ Join a support group. Sometimes sharing your feelings with others that are having the same feelings can make you less tired.

It may be hard for you to understand why more rest does not make your fatigue go away. This fatigue is different from the fatigue you had before you began your cancer treatment. This fatigue is a side effect of treatment and will be more easily managed if you follow the tips listed above.

## Stomatitis

### □ *What is stomatitis?*

Stomatitis is another word for mouth sores. Mouth sores can occur because of the treatments you are getting. Your mouth, gums or throat may feel sore or different. You may be able to see reddened areas in your mouth, or opened sores. The mouth sores which are caused by chemo treatment are not contagious.

Not all chemo drugs cause mouth sores. If one or some of the drugs you are getting do cause mouth sores, they may appear 5-14 days after the chemo is given. The mouth sores are a temporary side effect. Radiation therapy can cause mouth sores if the radiation beam is aimed towards the head or neck. These mouth sores are also temporary.


### □ *What can be done about mouth sores?*

#### ◆ Measures to prevent mouth sores:

- Drink plenty of cold fluids. Keep your mouth moist.
- Brush your teeth with a baby soft brush.
- Cleanse dentures after every meal to remove irritating food particles and to prevent infection.
- Look at your mouth 3-4 times a day to see if there are any sores.
- Do not use commercial mouthwashes. They usually have alcohol in them and this can dry out your mouth.
- Avoid using cigarettes, pipe smoking, cigars, chewing tobacco and alcohol.

#### ◆ Measures to help if you have mouth sores:

- Avoid foods and juices with high acidity like tomatoes, oranges and grapefruits.
- Avoid spicy foods. Foods that have pepper, chili powder or nutmeg may bother your mouth.
- Avoid very hot or very cold temperatures in the food as they may cause irritation.
- Use lip balm if your lips become dry.
- Eat bland, warm or cool, and soft foods such as custards, jello, yogurt, soups and eggs.
- Drink through a straw if you have mouth sores in order to bypass the sores.
- Add sauces and gravies to solid foods. Puree or liquify foods if you have decreased saliva or difficulty swallowing.

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- Your doctor can prescribe a special mouthwash that will help with the discomfort of mouth sores. This mouthwash can help prevent infection and promote healing of the mouth sores. Gargle with this mouthwash 15-20 minutes before meals to help you feel more comfortable.
  - Make your own non-irritating mouth wash by mixing 1 teaspoon of baking soda with 1 quart of warm water. Swish around in your mouth for a minute and spit it out. Repeat every 4 hours while awake.
  - If mouth sores are keeping you from eating enough calories, adding a liquid protein supplement to your diet will help you get enough protein and calories. Some of these that can be bought are: Carnation Instant Breakfast, Ensure, and Sustacal.
- ◆ Important symptoms to report to your doctor or nurse:
- Open sores in your mouth
  - Redness / irritation in your mouth
  - Difficulty chewing or swallowing
  - White patches on your tongue

## Diarrhea

### ❑ *Who is most likely to have diarrhea?*

Certain groups of people are more likely to have diarrhea. Those are:

- ◆ People receiving chemotherapy
- ◆ People receiving radiation therapy to the abdomen and pelvis
- ◆ People having abdominal surgical procedures
- ◆ People who are receiving liquid feedings through a tube

### ❑ *What can be done to avoid diarrhea?*

Some of the things that you can do to help avoid diarrhea are:

- ◆ Try to avoid foods and drinks that contain caffeine
- ◆ Avoid milk and milk products as they can worsen the diarrhea
- ◆ Avoid raw and spicy foods that can irritate the intestine and worsen the diarrhea
- ◆ Use nutmeg in your foods if you do not have stomatitis/mouth sores.  
Nutmeg slows down the movement of the intestine and helps control diarrhea
- ◆ Wash your hands well after each bowel movement to prevent the spread of infection

### ❑ *If I do get diarrhea, what can I do to control it?*

- ◆ Monitor your bowel movements for:
  - How many times a day you are having loose bowel movements
  - Consistency – very loose, semi-formed
  - Color
  - Amount
- ◆ Take the medications that your doctor has prescribed for diarrhea. Call your doctor or nurse if the medication is not working
- ◆ Drink at least 2-3 quarts of non-carbonated liquids every day while you are having diarrhea. This will replace the fluid you lose from the diarrhea
- ◆ Drink fluids high in electrolytes (i.e. Gatorade, Powerade) to replace the potassium and other nutrients lost with the diarrhea

- ◆ Eat small, frequent meals
- ◆ Use a heating pad on your abdomen
- ◆ Rest to conserve energy
- ◆ Take warm sitz baths and/or use soft warm cloths to ease the irritation that frequent bowel movements cause to the skin around your rectum
- ◆ Speak with your doctor or nurse before taking “over-the-counter” medications for diarrhea.



## Constipation

### ❑ *What is constipation?*

Constipation is defined as a decrease in frequency of bowel movements (or less than 3 bowel movements per week), along with difficulty or discomfort in having a bowel movement.

Constipation is not often seen as a side effect of radiation therapy. Chemo, however, can cause constipation. The chemo can interfere with the nerve impulses in your intestines, and this can cause your intestines to slow down and lead to constipation. Constipation is a temporary side effect of the chemo. Normal bowel function will return after your treatments end.

### ❑ *What can be done to avoid constipation?*

The key to managing constipation is to try to prevent it from happening. Some of the things you can do to help avoid constipation are:

- ◆ Drink plenty of fluids which helps to promote soft bowel movements. Warm and hot fluids work well as they encourage fluid to enter the bowel.
- ◆ Eat high fiber foods including bran, whole wheat breads, cereals, raw and cooked vegetables, fresh and dried fruits.
- ◆ Avoid cheese and refined grain products as they tend to be constipating.
- ◆ Avoid coffee, tea and grapefruit juice as they can cause constipation.
- ◆ Get plenty of exercise. Exercise helps your intestine to function well. Try to add some walking into your daily activities. Walking not only helps your bowels and intestines, but also helps fight the fatigue you may be feeling.
- ◆ Carry a bottle of water with you at all times.
- ◆ Have a bowel routine and try to stick to it. Having your bowel movement right after breakfast is best – morning is when your intestines are most active, and this helps your bowels to move.

## Nerve and Muscle Effects

### ❑ *What are nerve side effects?*

Nerve and muscle effects are not often seen as a side effect of radiation therapy. Some chemo drugs, however, can affect the nerves in your body. Because the nerves are responsible for controlling your feeling and movement, these side effects can be felt in many ways. The chemo drugs that effect your nerves may cause you to feel:

- ◆ tingling
- ◆ numbness
- ◆ burning
- ◆ pins and needles in your hands and feet

These are called peripheral neuropathies and are most common.

There are other possible side effects on the nervous system:

- ◆ confusion
- ◆ blurry vision
- ◆ sensitivity of your eyes to light
- ◆ hearing loss
- ◆ loss of sensation in your hands or feet
- ◆ unsteady on your feet
- ◆ clumsiness
- ◆ constipation
- ◆ stomach pains

### ❑ *What are muscle side effects?*

Some of the chemo drugs may cause your muscles to feel weak and sore, as if you had the flu.



□ ***What can be done about the nerve and muscle side effects?***

Some of the things you can do to help yourself are:

- ◆ Hold on to hand rails when climbing up and down stairs.
- ◆ Use a cane or lean on another person when walking to help keep you steady.
- ◆ Use pot holders when handling pots from the stove or oven, because you may not be able to feel how hot something actually is.
- ◆ Wear gloves or mittens and warm socks in very cold weather as you may not sense how cold it actually is.

In many cases, these side effects will go away when the chemo treatments are done. However, you must report any of these symptoms to your doctor or nurse, because they can be serious if not taken care of early.

## Skin and Nail Effects

### ❑ *What are the skin and nail side effects?*

Some of the cancer treatments can cause changes in your skin and nails. These include:

- ◆ Nails can become brittle, cracked, develop unusual lines up and down, and may become darkened
- ◆ Your skin may develop:
  - redness, peeling, itching, and acne
  - more sensitivity to the sun

Most of these side effects will go away once your treatments are done.

### ❑ *What can be done about skin and nail effects?*

There is little that can be done to prevent the nail and skin changes that occur because of cancer treatment. Being aware of these changes can lessen your becoming upset if you do develop these side effects. Some of the things you can do to help care for your nails and skin are:

- ◆ Keep your face clean and dry.
- ◆ Apply cornstarch to areas that itch.
- ◆ Take quick showers or sponge baths – avoid long, hot baths that will dry your skin.
- ◆ Put skin cream or lotion on while your skin is still moist.
- ◆ Avoid perfumes that have alcohol in them.
- ◆ Use sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 whenever you are in the sun, to protect your skin from sunburn.
- ◆ Wear a hat, sunglasses, long-sleeved cotton shirts and pants whenever you are in the sun.
- ◆ Do not have your nails manicured or use nail wraps during treatment.

### ❑ *Points to remember:*

Certain chemo drugs can be very harmful to your skin if they leak out of your vein while you are receiving your IV infusions. If you notice any pain, redness, wetness, or burning while you are receiving your IV infusion, notify your nurse immediately.

## Kidney and Bladder Effects

### ❑ *What are some possible kidney and bladder side effects?*

Certain cancer drugs, when given in high doses, can cause damage to the kidneys and affect your ability to make urine. Other chemo drugs can irritate the lining of the urinary bladder, affecting your ability to pass urine. Radiation therapy can cause kidney and bladder side effects when the radiation beam is aimed at that area of the body.

### ❑ *What are the symptoms to look for?*

If you develop any of the following signs or symptoms you must report them to your doctor or nurse immediately:

- ◆ blood in your urine
- ◆ pain when you urinate
- ◆ burning when you urinate
- ◆ feeling like you have to go to the bathroom to urinate often and quickly (frequency and urgency)
- ◆ not urinating as often as usual
- ◆ difficulty urinating

### ❑ *What can be done to avoid these side effects?*

Some things that you can do to help yourself are:

- ◆ Drink plenty of fluids - at least eight 8oz glasses per day. Water is best.
- ◆ Empty your bladder (urinate) often.

Your doctor will do blood tests before each of your treatments to be sure that your kidneys and bladder are okay. Your doctor may also want you to receive a lot of IV fluids (hydration) before your chemo in order to avoid or lessen the effects of the drugs. There are some medications that your doctor may order to decrease the effects on your kidneys and bladder.

If your doctor finds that your treatment is causing a problem with your kidneys or bladder, he/she may decrease the dose of your chemo drug, switch to another drug or delay your radiation therapy treatments until your symptoms are improved.



## Sexual Effects

### **□ *What kind of sexual changes can occur?***

Some cancer treatments can cause problems with your sexual functioning. The kinds of effects you will have will depend on the type of treatment you are getting.

- ◆ Certain kinds of cancers in men may be treated with female hormones in order to slow down or stop the growth of the cancer. Because these are female hormones, some of the possible sexual changes are:
  - Your breasts may get larger
  - You may have a decreased sexual drive or urge
  - Your body hair may become finer and thinner

These effects increase as the dose of the drugs are increased. The effects are temporary. When your treatment is over these side effects will disappear. Your appearance will return to what it was before the treatment began.

- ◆ You may become impotent or sterile

Some chemo drugs and radiation therapy treatments may lead to changes in sexual functioning in men. The changes that may occur can be temporary or permanent.

You may:

- be unable to gain or maintain an erection
- be unable to have children after your cancer treatments are over due to a fewer number of sperm being produced in your body, or because the sperm you produce do not live long enough

### **□ *What can be done about sexual side effects in men?***

Some of the things you can do to manage changes in sexual functioning are:

- ◆ Find other ways of expressing affection that are satisfying to you and your partner
- ◆ Even though certain treatments may cause a man to become sterile, the ability to have sexual intercourse can continue
- ◆ Some men do regain normal sperm counts after treatment
- ◆ Discuss with your partner, doctor and nurse the possibility of using a sperm bank to save your sperm should you want to have children in the future



- ◆ Following your treatment your doctor can recommend medications or procedures that may be helpful in managing impotence

These side effects can be very upsetting and distressing. It is important that you talk to your doctor or nurse who can help you find the support you need at this time.

Some of the sexual changes which occur in women are:

- ◆ Chemotherapy may cause changes in your menstrual cycle. Radiation therapy treatments may cause changes in your menstrual cycle if the radiation beam is aimed at that area of the body. Some of the changes you may experience are:
  - You may stop menstruating
  - You may notice a change in the length of your menstrual cycles, either longer or shorter
  - You may have spotting between your menstrual periods
  - You may have breast tenderness
  - You may start having symptoms of menopause while you are getting your chemo (mood changes, hot flashes, etc.)

Usually, these effects are temporary. Talk to your doctor or nurse about any questions you may have related to these changes.

- ◆ Painful intercourse

Normally, the inside of the vagina is moist, which allows for you to have intercourse without pain. Cancer treatments may change the lining of the vagina and decrease the moisture that is normally there. This can make intercourse painful for women. Radiation therapy to the abdomen or pelvis can cause the vagina to become shortened and narrow, which can cause intercourse to be painful for women.



### ◆ Sterility

Even though cancer treatments may cause sterility, the ability to have sexual intercourse is maintained and you should always practice some form of birth control to make sure that you will not become pregnant. Chemotherapy treatments may cause a woman to become sterile. Radiation therapy treatments may cause a woman to become sterile only if the radiation beam is aimed at that area of the body. This may be a temporary or permanent side effect of treatment.

- ◆ Women may resume normal patterns of ovulation once chemo is finished

### □ *What can be done about sexual side effects in women?*

For women who are experiencing painful intercourse:

- ◆ Use a lubricant such as K-Y Jelly to provide moisture to the vagina
- ◆ You can prevent the vagina from becoming narrow by using a vaginal dilator, which your doctor or nurse in the radiation therapy department can provide for you
- ◆ You can also prevent the vagina from narrowing by having frequent intercourse
- ◆ You may find that changing positions during intercourse can lessen the pain

It is very important to talk to your doctor or nurse about the use of birth control during the time you are getting your cancer treatments. Many cancer treatments can cause problems with the development of a fetus, so you should not become pregnant while you are receiving treatment for cancer. Your doctor or nurse will help you decide on the best birth control method for you and your partner. It is also important to talk to your partner about your feelings and concerns regarding your sex life – it may help you to cope with all of the changes you are going through.

## Pain Control

### ❑ *What causes pain in cancer?*

Pain in cancer can be caused by a number of different things. A growing tumor can press on nerves, destroy healthy tissue or obstruct the normal function of organs causing pain. Chemo and radiation therapy can affect nerves causing pain. Patients who've had surgery experience pain at the site where the surgeon opened the body or removed a part of the body. Also, the extreme emotional stress of cancer makes the pain worse.

### ❑ *What can be done about my pain?*

Cancer pain can be managed effectively by fairly simple means in up to 90% of those who have cancer. Pain management is more than just pain relief; it also impacts the quality of your life and:

- ◆ your ability to work
- ◆ your ability to enjoy recreation
- ◆ your ability to function normally in your family and in society

Your doctor will decide with you about which form of pain management will be best for you. Sometimes a combination of treatments will be best.

- ◆ Medications for pain relief may be given in the form of pills, IV infusion, skin patch, or a suppository.
- ◆ Radiation therapy may be used to shrink a tumor to relieve pain or the IV infusion of a special type of radiation therapy medication can be used to relieve widespread pain.
- ◆ Pain treatments work differently for different people. The doses of your medications may have to be adjusted to achieve the best level of pain control.
- ◆ Relaxation and meditation are techniques you can learn to help you relax, relieve stress and anxiety, and reduce pain.
- ◆ Therapeutic massage can improve muscle tone, improve flexibility, circulation and relieve stress and tension.
- ◆ Reflexology is a method of massaging the feet that may help to relieve symptoms such as pain, constipation, nausea and improve emotional and spiritual well being.
- ◆ Heat or cold can improve swelling and circulation.
- ◆ Exercise for mobility and flexibility can bring about pain relief.

### ❑ *What about side effects?*

There are some predictable and manageable side effects of pain management drugs:

- ◆ Tolerance - means that a larger dose of drug is required to maintain the same level of pain relief. Your doctor will increase the dose of your medication as you become tolerant. This is not addiction.
- ◆ Physical dependence - means that your body has adapted to the presence of the drug, so that the drug would have to be gradually lessened over time before stopping it all together. This is not addiction.
- ◆ Constipation – difficulty having a bowel movement is caused by most pain medications. Constipation can be managed by taking a mild laxative on a regular schedule and increasing the dose of the laxative whenever the dose of the pain medication is increased.
- ◆ Nausea and vomiting – can be caused by some pain medications. Your doctor can order a medication to prevent or manage this.
- ◆ Mental “clouding,” sleepiness or confusion – can be seen when pain medications are started or increased. It is usually temporary as tolerance develops quickly. If this persists, the dose can be lowered or you can be switched to another drug.

If pain is a concern for you, please report it to your physician and nurse so we may help you to deal with it. We have literature available on different pain medications and methods for pain control.

## Emotional Distress and Making Decisions

It is natural to feel depressed, anxious, or upset when you are being treated for cancer. But when you are depressed it is harder for your body to fight the cancer; going for treatments becomes more difficult; and pain tolerance is lessened. Everyone undergoing treatment has ‘bad’ days. However, it is not normal to feel bad all the time. In fact, you can take an active part in feeling good. You can help yourself to feel more relaxed, happier, and able to cope.

### *How do I know if I am depressed or anxious?*

People who are depressed or anxious often feel sad, jittery, irritable, worried, afraid, helpless and hopeless, confused, and lack interest in their normal activities. Some may even think about suicide. You may find that you do not want to go to your doctors’ appointments, or bathe, dress and care for yourself. Depressed or anxious people often have difficulty sleeping and lose their appetite, energy and concentration. Making decisions about treatment choices can become even more difficult during this time.

### *Why do I have these feelings?*

It is hard to adjust to the outward changes in our bodies that make us feel less attractive. It is difficult to give up our usual activities like child care, work, exercise, and caring for our families, even for a short while. Adjusting to not feeling well and coping with a life-threatening sickness can be discouraging, frightening, and overwhelming.

## Emotional Distress and Making Decisions

### □ *What can I do to help myself get rid of the “blues” and cope better?*

- ◆ Fortunately, there are lots of ways and they are not too difficult to do. Any activities that are right for you are the right ones.
  - Talk to your doctor and nurse about your feelings of sadness, fear or anxiety.
  - Have a daily routine of activities that you do each day; make sure there are some ‘fun’ activities included in the routine (coffee with friends, shopping, etc.).
  - Do some form of exercise regularly – even short walks are good.
  - Keep your mind active. Go to the movies, read, watch TV, visit with friends.
  - If faith is an important part of your life, prayer and talking with your priest, minister or rabbi may offer you a sense of peace.
  - Be part of a support group with others who are having cancer treatments.
  - Share your feelings with close friends or family members.
  - Use relaxation techniques: breathing exercises, relaxation exercises, massage, Qi Gong, yoga, aromatherapy, guided imagery. All of these can help your sense of well-being.
  - Keep a journal in which you write down your thoughts and feelings.

### □ *What if those things do not work for me?*

- Do not accept that you cannot feel better; get professional help from a therapist, counselor, psychiatrist, or psychologist.
- Take anti-depressant or anti-anxiety medications that the doctor can prescribe for you.

## Emotional Distress and Making Decisions

### □ *How can I make good decisions about my health care when I am depressed or anxious?*

- ◆ Even if you are depressed or anxious, you can make good choices about your own care; it just takes some extra planning. If you know that you have an important decision to make, try these steps to help you:
  - Gather LOTS of information about each choice. The doctor and nurse are excellent sources of information.
  - Prepare all of your questions for the doctor/nurse ahead of time and write them down so that when you are with the doctor or nurse, you have them ready.
  - You may want to write down the answers that they give you. If you don't understand the answer, ask them to rephrase the answer so that you can understand it.
  - Bring a family member or a trusted friend to the question/answer session; two pairs of ears are better than one.
  - Read; get information from the library, TV, or the internet about treatments, side effects, risks, new techniques, etc.
  - Discuss the information with your family, but remember that the final decision is yours.
  - Take time to think about the choices before making a decision. How would each choice affect the quality of your daily life now? How will the choice affect your future?
  - Keep in mind that you can change your mind later on if you need to.

## Clinical Trials

### □ *What is a Clinical Trial?*

New cancer treatments are being developed every day. The way new treatments are found is through clinical trials. A clinical trial is a study, using cancer patients, to help find the best and safest treatment for cancer. Clinical trials can:

- ◆ Test new treatments
- ◆ Look for new ways of preventing cancer
- ◆ Find new ways of screening patients for earlier diagnosis
- ◆ Look at improving the quality of life for cancer patients

Much of the current information we have about cancer and its treatments is due to patients' participation in clinical trials over the years.

Good cancer treatment begins with laboratory research. Researchers must then take the information they learned in the lab and apply it to patient diagnosis and treatment. New treatments must be determined to be as good as or better than treatments that are currently being used. The use of clinical trials helps researchers to decide this.

### □ *Why would a patient be interested in a clinical trial?*

Patients take part in clinical trials for many reasons:

- ◆ They hope for a cure for their disease
- ◆ They hope the clinical trial will give them longer to live
- ◆ They hope to feel better overall
- ◆ They want to contribute to research that may help others
- ◆ They have a chance, if the new treatment works, to be among the first to benefit from the treatment



□ ***Are there risks or side effects to taking part in clinical trials?***

Yes. As with any new treatment, there may be risks. The purpose of clinical trials is to get information about new, untried treatments. The risks, or side effects, may not always be known ahead of time. Part of the clinical trial is to make sure that the treatment is safe and doesn't cause harm to the patient. However, unexpected negative side effects may happen with any clinical trial.

It is important to remember that you will only take part in a clinical trial if you agree and give written consent to participate. Patient safety is the chief concern of the researchers who are doing the clinical research. If you do agree to participate in a clinical trial, you will be carefully followed by your doctor and nurses.

Your doctor or nurse will make you aware of any clinical trials that might be appropriate for you to participate in. They will give you all of the information you will need to make an informed decision about whether or not to take part in the clinical trial. It is also important to remember that even if you agree to take part in a clinical trial and start receiving the treatment, you can withdraw from the clinical trial at any time, should you decide to do so for any reason.



## Conclusion

We hope this resource guide has answered some of your questions about your treatment for cancer. This booklet is to be used as a secondary resource and should not take the place of discussion / questions between you and your oncologist, family physician, nurse or other health care worker.

Additional information regarding your specific treatment plan and chemotherapy drugs is available, and will be provided on an individual basis.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns. We recommend that you write down any questions you have prior to visiting with your doctor either in his/her office or while you are in the hospital or outpatient center.



## Important Resources

### ***The American Cancer Society:***

Patient services offer a full range of programs that focus on various cancers and the needs that are specific to patients and their families.

For information on cancer and community resources 24 hours a day, 7 days a week call 1-800-ACS (227)-2345 or [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) (information available in Spanish).

### ***CancerCare, Inc.***

Provides individual, family, and group counseling, financial assistance, home care, child care, transportation to treatment, pain medication, etc., free of charge to those who qualify, 1(800) 813-HOPE (4673) or [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) (information available in Spanish).

### ***National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS)***

1010 Wayne Avenue, Suite 770  
Silver Springs, Maryland 20910

Information, advocacy, resource referral for cancer survivors. Mission is to improve the quality of life for people with all types of cancer. (301) 650-9127 or 1(888) 650-9127 or [www.cansearch.org](http://www.cansearch.org)

### ***Leukemia and Lymphoma Society***

Information, support on all types of leukemia, myelomas, lymphomas, and related diseases. National Number: (914) 949-5213 or 1 (800) 955-4572  
Springfield, NJ (973) 376-9559,  
Mt. Ephraim, NJ (609) 931-8500  
[www.leukemia-lymphoma.org](http://www.leukemia-lymphoma.org)

### ***National Breast Cancer Coalition***

This organization seeks to increase appropriations for research, quality treatment, clinical trials, and assist women with decision making which impacts on treatment of breast cancer.  
1-800-622-2838  
[www.stopbreastcancer.org](http://www.stopbreastcancer.org)

### ***National Prostate Cancer Coalition***

Organization fostering knowledge and awareness of prostate cancer research and information.  
(813) 253-0541 ext. 458  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

### ***United Ostomy Association, Inc.***

Resources, information, and referral for patients undergoing rehabilitation for all ostomies.  
1-800-826-0826  
[www.uoa.org](http://www.uoa.org)

### ***American Pain Society***

Directory, pain management facilities (847) 375-4700. For general patient information on the management of pain they recommend American Pain Foundation at 1-888-615-7246.  
[www.painfoundation.org](http://www.painfoundation.org)

### ***National Cancer Institute (NCI)***

Public organization dedicated to increasing cancer awareness, education and research, as well as decreasing the financial burden of cancer. 1-(800)-4-CANCER  
[www.nci.nih.gov](http://www.nci.nih.gov)

***Good sources of help can be found at:  
1-800-4 Cancer  
[www.bymyside.com](http://www.bymyside.com).***

## Important Phone Numbers

Primary Medical Doctor \_\_\_\_\_

Medical Oncologist \_\_\_\_\_

Radiation Oncologist \_\_\_\_\_

Oncology Nurse Clinician \_\_\_\_\_

Cancer Center \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital \_\_\_\_\_

Outpatient Laboratory \_\_\_\_\_

Social Worker \_\_\_\_\_

Nutritionist \_\_\_\_\_

Medical Insurer  
(pre-certification) \_\_\_\_\_



- Clara Maass Medical Center, Belleville
- Community Medical Center, Toms River
  - Irvington General Hospital, Irvington
  - Kimball Medical Center, Lakewood
- Monmouth Medical Center, Long Branch
- Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, Newark
- Saint Barnabas Behavioral Health Center, Toms River
  - Saint Barnabas Medical Center, Livingston
  - Union Hospital, Union

