

Coping with Side Effects and Symptoms

Cancer treatment can also affect normal, healthy cells, which can result in side effects.

These side effects and symptoms can be different for every person.

Many effects of cancer and cancer treatment can be managed; therefore, it's important to talk to your health care team about any side effects, pain, or discomfort. There are many different types of prescription and over-the-counter treatments that can help manage side effects, including:

- Relieve pain
- Fight infections
- Treat anemia (abnormally low level of red blood cell counts)
- Strengthen bones
- Treat diarrhea
- Relieve constipation
- Reduce nausea and vomiting
- Treat hot flashes
- Treat depression

In addition to standard medical treatments, some complementary treatments may also help you feel better. Examples of complementary treatments include acupuncture or massage therapy. Talk to your doctor first before using any complementary therapies.

Maintaining Overall Health and Wellness

Nutrition

People with breast cancer should do their best to make healthy choices. Good nutrition can help keep your strength up and help you cope with side effects.

Additionally, a healthy diet may help lower the risk of infection. You may wish to talk to a dietitian or nutritionist to help you find a diet that allows you to get enough calories and protein - both of which are important in helping fight infection, as well as forming and maintaining tissues and enzymes. The following tips may be helpful:

- Try different plant-based foods, such as beans and peas, instead of meat, a few meals each week
- Try to eat at least 2½ cups of fruits and vegetables a day, including citrus fruits, dark-green and deep-yellow vegetables

- Choose low-fat milk and dairy products, and limit high-fat foods, especially those from animal sources
- Limit your intake of salt-cured, smoked, and pickled foods

Exercise

Staying active may help lessen fatigue, boost energy, and increase appetite. It is important to talk to your doctor if you plan to begin an exercise program. Exercise may help with fatigue and stress. It may also improve mood, self-esteem, and your sense of well-being, while also keeping you at a healthy weight.

Relaxation

Meditation, relaxation therapy, and massage may help relieve anxiety and stress. Remember to take time for yourself. You may need to plan ahead for times when you need more rest. Don't be afraid to ask for help and cut back on any extra commitments that may drain your time and energy. Friends and family can help support you with practical things, such as doing chores and arranging transportation to treatment.

Getting Support

For many people, a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer triggers a range of emotions—shock, disbelief, fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, and depression.

Talking to family and friends can be a source of comfort and is an effective way of coping. Some people join a support group or online community for breast cancer patients. Groups focusing on certain stages of cancer, such as metastatic disease, can be especially helpful.

You may find that talking to others with metastatic breast cancer eases some of your fears, as they learn how others cope.

Some people find comfort in spirituality. Some may wish to work with a religious leader to help them with their feelings, while others may prefer a mental health professional. Ask your doctor if he or she has any recommendations.

Everyone is different. Take time to find the support that is right for you.