

Guide to navigating...

Chemotherapy

What is chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy (aka “chemo”) is a type of treatment that uses drugs to kill cancer cells by either stopping or slowing the growth of cancer cells. Chemo is used for two reasons:

1. To treat cancer and reduce the risk of recurrence.
2. To ease cancer symptoms, such as shrinking the size of a tumor to lessen pain and/or other symptoms.

What are some common nutrition-related side effects?

- Chemo kills fast-growing cancer cells, but in doing so, it also kills healthy cells that also grow and divide quickly. Side effects are usually felt in the parts of the body that are made up of these fast-growing cells, including your mouth, intestines, and areas where hair grows.
- Nutrition side effects you may experience include mouth sores, taste changes, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and constipation.

How can I prepare for chemotherapy?

- Speak with your oncologist about side effects you may experience with your regimen and what to watch for.
- Eat a healthy diet, including plenty of high fiber plant foods and lean proteins.
- Stay hydrated, focusing on drinking plenty of water. Set a goal of 60-80 ounces per day.
- Maintain your weight before treatment starts. This helps lower your risk for infection, better manage side effects, and reduces your risk of having to take a pause/break during your regimen.
- Go to the dentist. Having a healthy mouth is important before starting treatment.
- Fill your fridge, freezer, and pantry with nourishing foods, including foods you can eat even when not feeling well.
- Stock up on foods that require minimal or no preparation/cooking.
- Cook and freeze foods/meals ahead of time for easy reheating.
- Create a grocery list of items you usually buy or keep stocked as a quick reference for loved ones who may do grocery shopping for you.

Guide to navigating...

Chemotherapy

How can I support myself nutritionally during chemotherapy?

- If feeling unwell, focus on when your appetite is the best and prioritize protein and calories to help keep up your strength and support healing.
- Be sure there is a food source of protein in meals and snacks, especially when your appetite is limited.
- Eat what sounds good to you. Do not force the consumption of certain foods. In addition, it is best to refrain from some of your favorite meals/dishes to reduce the risk of developing a food aversion.
- If eating is minimal on some days, do not stress. When your appetite improves, focus on consuming protein-rich foods, fiber, and healthy calories. If you go more than 2 days without eating, be sure to tell your physician.
- Prioritize hydration and consuming liquids. While water is best, this also can include electrolyte replacement drinks, soup or broth, smoothies or juices, and tea or coffee.
- Shift your mindset. Approach eating as part of your treatment and your role to support your health and recovery.
- Exercise. Moving in any way that feels good to you can have a variety of positive effects. This includes stimulating your appetite, reducing anxious feelings, promoting better sleep, improving treatment tolerance, and helping you feel better overall.
- Connect with a dietitian. Seeking the support of a nutrition expert can provide you with individualized tips and suggestions to best support you through chemotherapy.

For more information on nutrition and management of treatment-related side effects, visit our all-access [Nutrition Hub](#), and view our [Side Effect Guide](#).