

SIDE EFFECTS



In this section, you will learn about:

- Managing your side effects
- Tracking your side effects



Managing your side effects

Cancer treatments try to destroy the cancer cells in your body. Unfortunately, it is hard to destroy the cancer cells without damaging some healthy cells. Damage to healthy cells can cause side effects. The side effects you may have depend on:

- The type of treatment you receive
- The amount of treatment you are given
- Your overall health
- Other medications that you may be taking

It is important to remember that cancer **treatment will affect everyone differently**. A certain treatment can make one person feel sick, while someone else may receive the same treatment and feel nothing at all. Your health care team will explain which side effects you are most likely to have and will suggest ways to manage them.



Help us understand your symptoms

Managing your symptoms can improve your quality of life and well-being. One way to help you and your health care team learn if any side effects are of concern is by tracking changes over time. Changes to your care plan may be needed to help with these symptoms and help make you feel better.



To see how your symptoms are changing over time, you will be asked to rate ten symptoms on a scale of 1-10 as part of each appointment. You will also be asked to rate how the disease is impacting your daily life.

You will rate your symptoms at a touch screen computer called a kiosk. A volunteer can assist you if you would like help.

Managing fatigue

Fatigue is the most common side effect. Here are some tips to help you manage your tiredness:

- **Keep track of your energy levels** and plan activities around the part of the day when you have the most energy.
- **Exercise** can help you sleep better. Light activity, such as walking, can give you more energy. Being inactive can make you feel more tired.
- Eat a **balanced diet**.
- Plan for **rest** periods.

Sexuality and fertility during chemotherapy and radiation therapy



Side effects from your treatment, such as fatigue, pain or nausea may lower your desire to have sex. Certain drug treatments can lead to physical side effects. This includes early menopause and vaginal dryness for women and erectile dysfunction for men. Changes in your body appearance, feeling anxious about your health and the emotional stress of treatment can also affect your sexuality. Social workers are available to support you (see the “Counselling” section).

You should not get pregnant while you are having radiation therapy or for several months after treatment. Radiation can cause permanent damage to eggs and sperm. Certain chemotherapy drugs can lead to problems with fertility. Preserving your fertility by freezing sperm or eggs may be an option for you. If you are within child-bearing years or have questions about changes in your sexuality, speak with a member of your health care team.



Recommended resources

Visit the Patient & Family Resource Centre to pick up the following Canadian Cancer Society pamphlets:

- Chemotherapy and Other Drug Therapies: A guide for people with cancer
- Radiation Therapy: A guide for people with cancer
- Sexuality and Cancer

