

SIDE EFFECTS



In this section, you will learn about:

- Managing your side effects
- Common side effects of drug and radiation therapy
- Sexuality and fertility
- Online self-management tools
- Recommended resources

Managing Your Side Effects

Cancer treatments try to destroy the cancer cells in your body. Unfortunately for some treatments, 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 or combination of treatments
- How the treatment is given (e.g. by mouth or vein)
- 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 can choose to rate your symptoms at a touch screen computer called a kiosk, on an iPad supplied by the hospital, or on your own device by visiting: <https://isaac.cancercare.on.ca/>. A volunteer is there to help you log into the system. Do your best to answer the questions. You may ask for clarification with your health care provider during your appointment.



Important Points to Remember

- You may not have any side effects. Everyone is different.
- In most cases, you will be able to manage the side effects on your own.
- Side effects usually go away after you finish your treatment.
- Keep track of any side effects that you may have in a diary, on a calendar or in a notebook.

Side Effects

Your health care team is there to help. Tell them about any side effects that you are experiencing. There are resources available for most side effects that your health care team can give to you and explain during your visit. These resources will tell you how to manage the symptoms and when to call for help.

Common side effects related to each treatment can be found on the next few pages.

What do I do if I am experiencing side effects?



If you are calling about symptoms, you should call **519-685-8600**. **Press '1' for patient and then press '3' to reach the Triage Nursing Line.** These lines are very busy. Please stay on the line until your call is answered.

The Clinic Services and Triage Nursing Line phones are answered

Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The office is closed from 12:00 p.m. until 1:00 p.m. daily.

If it is after hours, a weekend, or a holiday, call **CAREChart@home after-hours nursing line (1-877-681-3057)**, your family doctor, Telehealth Ontario or go to the nearest Emergency Department.

Chemotherapy: Common Side Effects

Chemotherapy drugs kill cancer cells, but they can also damage healthy cells. Side effects are due to damage to healthy cells. Different cells and tissues in the body react differently with chemotherapy. Chemotherapy medications affect cells that rapidly grow and divide, such as blood cells in the bone marrow, hair follicle cells, and cells lining the mouth and gastrointestinal (GI) tract.

Some common side effects include:

- Low blood cell counts
 - Low white blood cells
 - Low red blood cells
 - Low platelets
- Fatigue
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Hair loss
- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Inflamed vein
- Thinking and memory changes (“chemo brain”)
- Inflamed mucous membranes
 - Esophagus
 - Rectum
 - Vagina
- Sore mouth
- Changes in taste and smell
- Skin changes
- Eye changes
- Pain
- Sexuality and fertility problems
- Hearing problems
- Numbness, burning or tingling in hands and feet



Ask your health care team for information on specific side effects of your chemotherapy medication.

Immunotherapy: Common Side Effects

Immunotherapy medications help the immune system work better to destroy cancer cells. It is used to stop or slow down the growth of cancer and prevent it from spreading.

Some common side effects include:

- Fatigue
- Skin reactions
- Flu-like symptoms



Ask your health care team for information on specific side effects of your immunotherapy medication.

Radiation Therapy: Common Side Effects

Radiation therapy damages cancer cells but can also damage healthy cells in the treatment area. Damage to healthy cells causes side effects. Different people may have different side effects even if they are being treated in the same area. **You only get radiation side effects in the area of treatment.**

The side effects of radiation therapy will depend on:

- The type of radiation therapy
- The part of your body being treated
- The amount (dose) of radiation and how frequently you receive it
- Your overall health

Some common side effects of radiation in general include (depending on the location of treatment):

- Fatigue
- Skin changes (similar to a sunburn)
- Swallowing changes or sore throat
- Heartburn
- Cough
- Pain flare up
- Nausea
- Cough
- Frequent bowel movements or urination
- Hair loss in treatment area only



Ask your health care team for information on specific side effects based on your treatment schedule and the area of your body receiving radiation therapy.



Remember, your health care team is here to help!

There are resources available for most side effects that your health care team can give to you and explain during your visit. These resources will help you manage the symptoms at home and tell you when to call for help.



Sexuality and Fertility

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 or father a child while you are having drug therapy or radiation therapy or for several months after treatment. Radiation can cause permanent damage to eggs and sperm. Use condoms while either partner is receiving treatment. All bodily fluids contain drug therapy. Certain cancer treatments can lead to problems with fertility, such as:

- Decreased sperm count - consider sperm banking before starting drug therapy or radiation
- Premature menopause - hot flashes, mood swings, and vaginal dryness. Use lubricants if needed.

There are different options for preserving your fertility. If you are within child-bearing years or have questions about changes in your sexuality, speak with a member of your health care team. They can refer you to the LHSC Fertility Clinic to support you in reaching your goals of building a family in the future. For more information, visit www.londonfertility.ca.



Online Self-Management Resources

These free courses provide tools and support for individuals living with long-term chronic conditions.

- Self-Management Ontario:

<https://www.selfmanagementontario.ca/>

- South West Self-Management Program:

<https://www.swselfmanagement.ca/ConsumerWorkshops/upcomingWorkshops.aspx>



Recommended Resources

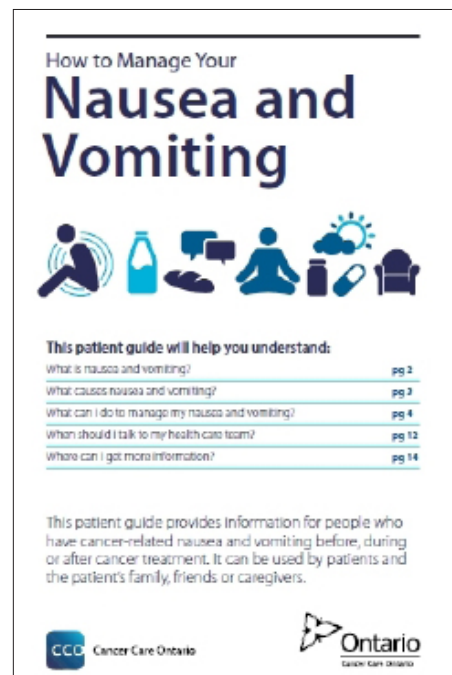
Visit the Patient and Family Resource Centre on Level 1 of LRCP to pick up the following Canadian Cancer Society booklets:

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

You can visit **www.cancer.ca** for online versions of these booklets and other information.

You can also take home copies of the Symptom Management Guides. These guides are available in the Patient and Family Resource Centre on Level 1 of LRCP and on the bulletin boards across from the Level 2 elevators. These guides will help you manage the symptoms and tell you when to call for help. There are guides available on the following topics:

- Fatigue
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Nausea and vomiting
- Shortness of breath
- Pain
- Mouth problems
- Loss of appetite
- Exercise
- Fever



These guides are also available for download at:

<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/symptom-management>