

# Chemotherapy at Home: Your Side Effect Guide

Medical-Surgical · Hematology / Oncology

Chemotherapy kills fast-growing cancer cells, but it also harms fast-growing healthy cells in your blood, mouth, stomach, and hair. These steps ease side effects and keep you safe.

## Calm nausea

- Take your nausea medicine on schedule, even before you feel sick.
- Eat small, bland meals, such as crackers, toast, or rice.
- Avoid greasy, spicy, or strong-smelling foods. Sip fluids between meals.

## Care for your mouth

- Brush gently with a soft toothbrush after meals and at bedtime.
- Rinse with 1/4 teaspoon baking soda and 1/8 teaspoon salt in 1 cup of warm water.
- Do not use mouthwash that contains alcohol.

## Handle tiredness, hair, and bowels

- Rest when you need to. Take short walks most days.
- Hair loss usually starts 2 to 3 weeks after the first treatment. It grows back after treatment ends.
- For diarrhea, drink extra fluids. For constipation, add fluids, fiber, and walking.

## Prevent bleeding when platelets are low

- Use a soft toothbrush and an electric razor. Blow your nose gently.
- Do not take aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve) unless your oncology team says so.

## Prevent infection

- Wash your hands often. Stay away from crowds and sick people.
- Cook meat and eggs well. Wash fruit and vegetables.
- **Fever of 100.4 F (38 C) or higher: call your oncology team right away, day or night.**
- Your oncology team's number: \_\_\_\_\_.

### Call your provider today if you have

- Vomiting that keeps you from drinking for 24 hours
- More than 4 to 6 loose stools a day
- Mouth sores that keep you from eating or drinking
- New bruises, tiny red spots on your skin, or bleeding gums

### Call 911 or your local emergency number if you have

- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain
- Bleeding that will not stop with pressure
- New confusion

*This handout supports, not replaces, advice from your own nurse or doctor.*

Online: [nclexpace.com/patient-education/chemotherapy-side-effects-at-home/patient](https://nclexpace.com/patient-education/chemotherapy-side-effects-at-home/patient)

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