

### When to call your doctor:

Tell your health care team if you feel extremely tired and are not able to do your normal activities or are very tired even after resting or sleeping. Keeping track of your levels of energy throughout the day will help your doctor assess your fatigue. Write down how fatigue affects your daily activities and what makes the fatigue better or worse.

### Ways to Manage Fatigue:

You may be advised to take these and other steps to feel better:

- **Make a plan that balances rest and activity.** Choose activities that are relaxing for you. Many people choose to listen to music, read, meditate, or spend time with people they enjoy. Relaxing can help you save your energy and lower stress. Light exercise may also be advised by your doctor to give you more energy and help you feel better. Even 15 to 30 minutes a day can help give you energy.
- **Plan time to rest.** If you are tired, take short naps of less than 1 hour during the day. However, too much sleep during the day can make it difficult to sleep at night. Choose the activities that are most important to you and do them when you have the most energy. Ask for help with important tasks such as making meals or driving.
- **Eat and drink well.** Meet with a registered dietician to learn about food and drinks that can increase your level of energy. Foods high in protein and calories will help you keep up your strength. Some people find it easier to eat many small meals throughout the day instead of three big meals. Stay well hydrated. Limit your intake of caffeine and alcohol.
- **Meet with a specialist.** It may help to meet with a counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist. These experts help people cope with difficult thoughts and feelings. Lowering stress may give you more energy and help you sleep better. Since pain that is not controlled can also be a major source of fatigue, it may help to meet with a pain or palliative care specialist.

## Neutropenia

**Neutropenia is when a person has a low level of neutrophils. Neutrophils are a type of white blood cell. All white blood cells help the body fight infection. Neutrophils fight infection by destroying harmful bacteria that invade the body. It is common for people with cancer who are receiving treatment to have some level of neutropenia.**

People who have neutropenia have a greater risk of potentially developing serious infections. This is because they do not have enough neutrophils to kill organisms that cause infection. People with severe or longer-lasting neutropenia are most likely to develop infection.

Neutropenia itself may not cause any symptoms. People usually find out they have neutropenia from a blood test or when they get an infection. Your doctor will schedule regular blood tests to look for neutropenia.

### When to call your doctor:

For people with neutropenia, even a minor infection can quickly become serious. Call your doctor immediately if you have any of these signs of infection:

- Fever, which is a temperature of 100.5°F (38°C) or higher
- Chills or sweating
- Sore throat, sores in the mouth, ear pain, or a toothache
- Abdominal pain
- Pain or burning when urinating
- A cough or shortness of breath
- Any redness, swelling or pain (especially around a cut, wound, or catheter)

### Ways to Manage Neutropenia

Some strategies to manage neutropenia:

- **Get routine blood draws.** Oftentimes neutropenia itself doesn't cause any symptoms, so it's important that your blood counts are being monitored by your doctor. Your doctor will order blood tests to watch for neutropenia. Ensure that you get your blood drawn as your doctor has ordered.
- **Practice good personal hygiene.** Practice good personal hygiene to lower your risk of infection. This includes washing your hands with soap and water regularly. Use hand sanitizer when you can't find soap and water.
- **Check with your doctor before you take any medicine.** This includes aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol®), or ibuprofen (Advil®).
- **Try to stay away from germs.** Stay away from people who are sick or have a cold. Try to stay away from big crowds if you can. Wash raw fruits and vegetables. Wash your hands carefully after you handle raw meat. Cook meat well before eating it.

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## RET- Positive Symptom Management Toolkit

### Anemia

**Anemia is when a person has a low level of red blood cells. Red blood cells function to carry oxygen from the lungs throughout your body to help it work properly. If red blood cell levels are too low, parts of the body do not get enough oxygen and cannot work properly. It is common for people with cancer who are receiving treatment to have some level of anemia. Your doctor will schedule regular blood tests to look for anemia and monitor it if you are found to be anemic.**

People with anemia often describe feeling very tired, short of breath, and lightheaded. Other signs of anemia may include feeling dizzy or faint, headaches, a fast heartbeat, and/or pale skin. If the anemia is mild, you may not experience any symptoms.

Your doctor will determine the appropriate treatment for your anemia based upon your blood counts, your symptoms, and what is causing the anemia. Some treatment options that your doctor may recommend include a transfusion of red blood cells, supplementation with vitamin B12, iron, or folic acid, or in some cases injections with medicines called erythropoiesis-stimulating agents, which work by telling your bone marrow to make more red blood cells.

### When to call your doctor:

Contact your doctor if you feel very tired, short of breath, lightheaded, dizzy or faint, or have a fast heartbeat.

### Ways to Manage Anemia

- **Get routine blood draws.** Sometime anemia itself doesn't cause any symptoms, so it's important that your blood counts are being monitored by your doctor. Your doctor will order blood tests to watch for anemia. Ensure that you get your blood drawn as your doctor has ordered.

Anemia can cause fatigue. Here are some steps you can take if you have fatigue caused by anemia:

- **Save your energy and ask for help.** Choose the most important thing to do each day. When people offer to help, let them do so. They can help you do things you are too tired to do.
- **Balance rest with activity.** Take short naps during the day, but keep in mind that too much bed rest can make you feel weak. You may feel better if you take short walks or exercise a little every day.
- **Eat and drink well.** Talk with your doctor or a registered dietician to learn what foods and drinks are best for you. You may need to eat foods that are high in protein or iron.

### Constipation

**Constipation occurs when stools become less frequent, painful, or dry and difficult to pass. Constipation starts when the body absorbs more water or signals food to move through the bowels more slowly.**

In addition to not being able to have a bowel movement, other signs of constipation may include:

- Pain and cramping
- Swelling in the abdomen
- Appetite loss
- Nausea and vomiting
- Not being able to urinate
- Confusion

### When to call your doctor:

Let your doctor know if you have not had a bowel movement in 2 days or if you have pain in your rectal area. Also, tell your health care team if your symptoms are new or are getting worse. Your doctor will determine what is causing your symptoms, advise you on what steps to take, and may prescribe medicine.

Constipation can be a sign of a more serious problem and your doctor may order you more tests such as a rectal examination, an x-ray, or other imaging scans. It's important to treat constipation properly because it can lead to various problems, including damaging your intestine or rectum, cause dehydration, and may slow your body's ability to absorb medicine.

### Ways to Manage Constipation:

Steps you can take to manage constipation include:

- **Drink more liquids.** Most people need to drink at least 8 cups of liquid every day. Water is a good choice. So are fruit and vegetable juices, such as prune juice. Warm liquids such as coffee or tea may help.
- **Eat more fiber or take fiber supplements.** Depending on the cause of your constipation, such as scar tissue or a tumor narrowing your bowel, your doctor may recommend a low-fiber diet. Talk to your doctor prior to increasing your fiber consumption. Foods that are high in fiber are: whole-grain breads, fruits and vegetables, and nuts, seeds and popcorn.
- **Be more active.** Walk or ride an exercise bike for 15 to 30 minutes a day. Talk with your doctor to learn about other exercises are right for you.
- **Take your medicine.** Some medicines may help with constipation, such as laxatives, enemas, or rectal suppository. Be sure to talk to your doctor first because some of these medicines may be harmful if not used in the appropriate setting.

## Diarrhea

**Diarrhea means having bowel movements that are soft, loose, or watery more often than normal. If diarrhea is severe or lasts a long time, the body does not absorb enough water and nutrients. This can cause you to become dehydrated or malnourished. Cancer treatments, or the cancer itself, may cause diarrhea or make it worse. Tell your health care team if you have diarrhea.**

### When to call your doctor:

Diarrhea that leads to dehydration (the loss of too much fluid from the body) and low levels of salt and potassium (important minerals needed by the body) can be life threatening. Call your health care team if you feel dizzy or lightheaded, have dark yellow urine or are not urinating, or have a fever of 100.5° F (38°C) or higher.

### Ways to Manage Diarrhea:

You may be advised to take steps to prevent complications from diarrhea:

- **Drink plenty of fluid each day.** Most people need to drink 8 to 12 cups of fluid each day. Ask your doctor how much fluid you should drink each day. For severe diarrhea, only clear liquids or IV (intravenous) fluids may be advised for a short period.
- **Eat small meals that are easy on your stomach.** Eat six to eight small meals throughout the day, instead of three large meals. Foods high in potassium and sodium (minerals you lose when you have diarrhea) are good food choices, for most people. Limit or avoid foods and drinks that could make your diarrhea worse. Some examples of foods and drinks that could worsen diarrhea include: alcohol, milk, dairy products, caffeine-containing products (coffee, tea, chocolate), high fiber foods (raw fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grain products), and high fat foods (deep-fried food).
- **Check before taking medicine.** Check with your doctor before taking medicine for diarrhea. Your doctor will prescribe the correct medicine for you.
- **Keep your anal area clean and dry.** Try using warm water and wipes to stay clean. It may help to take warm, shallow baths. These are called sitz baths.

## Dry Mouth

**Dry mouth occurs when your salivary glands do not make enough saliva, or spit, to keep the mouth moist. Because saliva is needed for chewing, swallowing, tasting, and talking, these activities may be difficult with a dry mouth.**

Dry mouth may also cause dental problems. Saliva helps to maintain a healthy balance of bacteria in the mouth. Without enough saliva, bacteria in the mouth may grow too quickly, causing sores and mouth infections, including thrush. Saliva also washes away food particles and acids in the mouth after eating. This means a lack of saliva can also contribute to gum disease and cavities. Dry mouth may also make it difficult to wear dentures.

Signs and symptoms of a dry mouth may include:

- A sticky, dry feeling in the mouth
- Thick, stringy saliva
- Pain or a burning sensation in the mouth or on the tongue
- Cracks in the lips or at the corners of the mouth
- A dry, tough tongue
- Difficulty chewing, tasting, or swallowing
- Difficulty talking

### When to call your doctor:

Tell your health care team if your symptoms are new or are getting worse. Your doctor will determine what is causing your symptoms, advise you on what steps to take, and may prescribe medicine.

### Ways to Manage Dry Mouth

Dry mouth cannot be prevented, but some treatments can help. Some tips to manage dry mouth and prevent dental problems include:

- **Brush your teeth after each meal** and at bedtime. Brush teeth with a soft-bristle toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Consider soaking the brush in warm water prior to brushing to make the bristles even softer.
- **Floss gently** once a day.
- **Rinse your mouth.** Rinse your mouth 4 to 6 times a day, especially after meals, with salt and baking soda. Try a solution of half a teaspoon of salt and half a teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup of warm water.
- **Keep your mouth moist.** Drink sips of water throughout the day and use artificial saliva to moisten your mouth.
- **Avoid mouthwashes and other dental products that contain alcohol.** There are dental products designed for people with dry mouth that are available without a prescription. Some doctors and dentists may also prescribe medicines to increase saliva or rinses to treat infections in the mouth.
- **Use a cool mist humidifier,** especially at night.

Consider the following tips for eating with a dry mouth:

- Drink at least 8 cups of water a day. Consider carrying a bottle of water with you to help you drink enough.
- Eat soft, moist foods that are cool or at room temperature.
- Moisten dry foods with broth, sauces, butter, or milk.
- Avoid dry, coarse, or hard foods.
- Avoid acidic or spicy foods that can burn your mouth.
- Do not smoke or chew tobacco.
- Avoid sticky, sugary foods and drinks.

## Dysgeusia (Taste Changes)

**Some people may have taste changes during cancer treatment. Some common taste changes people report are:**

- Foods may taste differently than before, especially bitter, sweet and/or salty foods.
- Some foods may taste bland.
- Every food may have the same taste.
- You may have a metallic or chemical taste in your mouth, especially after eating meat or other high-protein content foods.

Taste changes may lead to loss of appetite and weight loss. It may also cause a strong dislike of certain foods, also called food aversions.

### When to call your doctor:

Tell your health care team if you have any taste changes, especially if they are affecting your ability to eat healthy foods and maintain your weight.

### Ways to Manage Dysgeusia (Taste Changes)

Often, there are no specific treatments for taste problems. Consider the following tips to cope with taste changes:

- Choose foods that smell good and taste good, even if the food is not familiar.
- If you are sensitive to smells, get rid of cooking odors. Use an exhaust fan, cooking on an outdoor grill, or buy precooked foods. Cold or room-temperature foods smell less.
- Eat cold or frozen foods, which may taste better than hot foods.
- Use plastic utensils and glass cookware to lessen a metallic taste.
- Try sugar-free gum or hard candies with flavors such as mint, lemon, or orange. These flavors can help mask a bitter or metallic taste in the mouth.
- Avoid red meats if they do not taste good. Try other protein sources like poultry, eggs, fish, peanut butter, beans, or dairy products.
- Marinate meats in fruit juices, sweet wines, sugar, lemon, or sauces.
- Rinse your mouth with a salt and baking soda solution before meals. Mix ½ teaspoon of salt and ½ teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup of warm water. It may help stop bad tastes in the mouth.
- Keep a clean and healthy mouth by brushing frequently and flossing daily.

## Fatigue

**Fatigue is a common side effect of many cancer treatments. Conditions such as anemia, as well as pain, medications, and emotions, can cause or worsen fatigue.**

People often describe cancer-related fatigue as feeling extremely tired, weak, heavy, run down, and having no energy. Resting does not always help with cancer-related fatigue. Cancer-related fatigue is one of the most difficult side effects for many people to cope with.