

Arthralgia (Joint Pain)

A joint is where 2 bones in your body connect. Pain in the joints is also called arthralgia. Joint pain can occur in the hands, feet, knees, hips, shoulders, low back, spine, and other joint areas. Joint pain may be mild or severe. The pain may last a short time or may be constant for a long time.

Symptoms of joint pain may include:

- Pain in a joint with movement or at rest
- Limited range of movement
- Stiffness after inactivity or during activity
- Swelling or tenderness at a joint
- Warmth or redness at a joint
- Not being able to do everyday activities

When to call your doctor:

Tell your health care team if you notice joint pain. Your doctor will determine what is causing your symptoms, advise you on what steps to take, and may prescribe medicine.

Some problems related to joint pain are serious. Call your doctor right away if you develop symptoms in addition to the joint pain, such as new or more severe back pain, pain around the waist or chest, loss of bladder or bowel control, or weakness and/or numbness and tingling in the lower body.

Ways to Prevent or Lessen Joint Pain:

Steps to prevent or lessen joint pain include:

- **Medication.** Your doctor may prescribe you medication to treat or reduce joint pain. Your doctor will determine the cause of your joint pain and then may prescribe the most appropriate medication for you.
- **Physical Therapy.** A physical therapist can help restore function in a joint, as well as teach you how to relieve the pain by performing certain exercises. Talk to your doctor to see if they recommend consulting with a physical therapist to manage your joint pain.
- **Massage.** A massage therapist can do a gentle therapeutic massage that can help ease joint pain.
- **Exercise.** Stretching and gentle exercise may reduce joint pain. Exercise can also help you manage your weight so that there is less stress on your joints. Additional benefits of exercise include strengthening your bones and muscles around your joints, as well as increasing joint flexibility.
- **Heat and cold.** Hot or cold compresses, heating pads, or ice packs may help decrease the discomfort from joint pain.

Myalgia (Muscle Pain)

Pain in the muscles is also called myalgia. You may feel an ache in a specific area of your body, or you may feel like your entire body aches. Some muscle aches are mildly uncomfortable while others may be severe. They may last a short time or be constant for a long time.

When to call your doctor:

Tell your health care team if you notice muscle pain. Your doctor will determine what is causing your symptoms, advise you on what steps to take, and may prescribe medicine.

Some problems related to muscle pain are serious. Call your doctor right away if you develop symptoms in addition to the muscle pain, such as muscle weakness, fever, pain around the waist or chest, loss of bladder control, confusion, stiff neck, or numbness and tingling anywhere in the body.

Ways to Prevent or Lessen Muscle Pain:

Steps to prevent or lessen muscle pain include:

- **Medication.** Your doctor may prescribe you medication to treat or reduce muscle pain. Your doctor will determine the cause of your muscle pain and then may prescribe the most appropriate medication for you.
- **Physical Therapy.** A physical therapist can treat muscle problems and teach you how to relieve pain using exercises. Talk to your doctor to see if they recommend consulting with a physical therapist to manage your muscle pain.
- **Exercise.** Gentle exercise may help loosen muscles and increase blood flow to them.
- **Heat and cold.** Hot or cold compresses, heating pads, or ice packs may help decrease the discomfort from muscle pain.
- **Relaxation techniques.** Gentle breathing or meditation may help to enhance relaxation and reduce muscle tension.

The above material was adapted from and originally published by Cancer.Net



GIST Treatment Symptom Management Toolkit

Nausea and Vomiting

Nausea is when you feel sick to your stomach, as if you are going to throw up. Vomiting is when you throw up. There are different types of nausea and vomiting caused by cancer treatment. Controlling nausea and vomiting will help you to feel better and prevent more serious problems such as malnutrition and dehydration.

Your doctor will determine what is causing your symptoms and advise you on ways to prevent them. Medicines called anti-nausea or antiemetics are effective in preventing or reducing many types of nausea and vomiting. Sometimes, several different medicines may be tried to find the one that works best for you. There are also practical steps you may be advised to take to feel better, including those listed below.

When to call your doctor:

Contact your doctor and seek immediate medical attention if you have a fever of 100.5°F (38°C) or higher, blood (bright red or black) in your vomit or vomit that looks like coffee grounds, severe cramping or acute abdominal pain, dizziness, weakness, confusion, dark urine or if you are not producing urine, or projectile vomiting.

Ways to Manage Nausea and Vomiting:

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

- **Take an anti-nausea medicine.** Talk with your doctor to learn when to take your medicine. Tell your doctor if the medicine doesn't help. There are different kinds of medicine and one may work better than another for you.
- **Drink plenty of water and fluids.** Drinking will help to prevent dehydration, a serious problem that happens when your body loses too much fluid and you are not drinking enough. Try to sip on water, fruit juices, ginger ale, tea, and/or sports drinks throughout the day.
- **Avoid certain foods.** Don't eat greasy, fried, sweet, or spicy foods if you feel sick after eating them. If the smell of food bothers you, ask others to make your food. Try cold foods that do not have strong smells, or let food cool down before you eat it.

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 healthcare 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.



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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.

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.

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.
- **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.

Edema (Swelling)

Edema, a condition in which fluid builds up in your body's tissues, may be caused by some types of cancer medication, certain cancers, and conditions not related to cancer.

Signs of edema may include:

- Swelling in your feet, ankles, and legs
- Swelling in your hands and arms
- Swelling in your face, around your eyes, or abdomen
- Skin that is puffy, shiny, or looks slightly dented after being pressed
- Shortness of breath, a cough, or irregular heartbeat

When to call your doctor:

Tell your health care team if you notice swelling. Your doctor will determine what is causing your symptoms, advise you on what steps to take, and may prescribe medicine.

Some problems related to edema are serious. Call your doctor if you feel short of breath, have a heartbeat that seems different or is not regular, have sudden swelling or swelling that is getting worse or is moving up your arms or legs, you gain weight quickly, or you don't urinate at all or urinate only a little.

Ways to Prevent or Lessen Edema:

Steps you can take to prevent or lessen edema-related swelling include:

- **Get comfortable.** Wear loose fitting clothing and shoes that are not too tight. When you sit or lie down, raise your feet with a stool or pillows. Avoid crossing your legs when you sit. Talk with your doctor about wearing special stockings, sleeves, or gloves that help with circulation if your swelling is severe.
- **Exercise.** Moving the part of your body with edema can help. Your doctor may give you specific exercises, including walking, to improve circulation. However, you may be advised not to stand or walk too much at one time.
- **Limit salt (sodium) in your diet.** Avoid foods such as chips, bacon, ham, and canned soup. Check food labels for the sodium content. Don't add salt or soy sauce to your food.
- **Take your medicine.** If your doctor prescribes a medicine called a diuretic, take it exactly as instructed. The medicine will help to move the extra fluid and salt out of your body.

**The above material was adapted from "Side Effects of Cancer Treatment" and was originally published by the National Cancer Institute.*

Hair Loss (Alopecia)

Some types of chemotherapy cause the hair on your head and other parts of your body to fall out. Hair loss is called alopecia.

Ways to Manage Hair Loss:

Some strategies to manage before and after hair loss:

- **Treat your hair gently.** You may want to use a hairbrush with soft bristles or a wide-tooth comb. Do not use hair dryers, irons, or products such as gels or clips that may hurt your scalp. Wash your hair with a mild shampoo. Wash it less often and be very gentle. Pat it dry with a soft towel.
- **You have choices.** Some people choose to cut their hair short to make it easier to deal with when it starts to fall out. If you plan to buy a wig, get one while you still have hair so that you can match it to the color of your hair. If you find wigs to be itchy and hot, try wearing a comfortable scarf or a turban.
- **Protect and care for your scalp.** Use sunscreen or wear a hat when you are outside. Choose a comfortable hat or scarf that you enjoy and protects your head. If your scalp itches or feels tender, using lotions and conditioners can help it feel better.

Ways to care for your Hair If it Grows Back:

- **Be gentle.** If your hair starts to grow back, you will want to be gentle with it. Avoid too much brushing, curling, and blow drying. You may not want to wash your hair as frequently.
- **Your hair may change.** Your hair may be very fine if it starts to grow back. Sometimes your new hair can be curlier or straighter-or even a different color. In time, it may go back to how it was before treatment.

Hand Foot Syndrome (Palmar-plantar Erythrodysesthesia Syndrome)

Hand Foot syndrome is a condition marked by pain, swelling, numbness, tingling or redness of the palms of the hands or the soles of the feet. Sometimes blisters may appear. Symptoms of mild or moderate hand foot syndrome include redness, swelling, a feeling of tingling or burning, sensitivity to touch, tightness of the skin, and thick calluses or blisters. Symptoms of severe hand foot syndrome include cracked, flaking or peeling skin, blisters, ulcers, or sores on the skin, or severe pain. It sometimes occurs as a side effect of certain anticancer medications and is also called palmar-plantar erythrodysesthesia.

When to call your doctor:

If you notice early signs of hand foot syndrome, or if you notice your symptoms are getting worse, you should call your doctor's office. You should seek immediate medical attention for any of the following situations:

- A temperature greater than or equal to 100.4 °F (38°C) and/or redness
- Discharge or odor from any open areas
- Unable to perform daily self-care activities
- When pain is not controlled

Ways to Manage Hand Foot Syndrome:

You may be advised to take steps to prevent complications from hand foot syndrome:

- **Avoid exposure to hot water.** Take showers or baths with lukewarm water and gently pat your skin dry.
- **Avoid tight clothing, shoes, socks and jewelry.** Instead wear loose fitting, well ventilated shoes and clothes.
- **Avoid contact with harsh chemicals** found in laundry detergents or household cleaning products.
- **Moisturize your hands and feet.** Gently apply skin creams, avoiding rubbing or massaging your feet.
- **Your doctor may recommend** certain medications to treat hand foot syndrome. Medications that your doctor may recommend may include topical or oral pain relievers, or topical exfoliant creams that are available over the counter or by prescription. These medications may contain urea, salicylic acid, or ammonium lactate.