

Helping Yourself through Chemotherapy for AML

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

Chemotherapy can affect many parts of your body. With a little effort, you can prevent a lot of problems and also make the side effects less uncomfortable.

Exercise

The single most important thing you can do while you are in the hospital is to exercise every day. Exercise helps to keep your heart and lungs active and working well. It helps prevent infection and also helps to keep up your strength and generally feel better.

Try to walk at least once a day. Twenty-four laps around your unit in Vanderbilt Hospital equals one mile. Walk as far as you can without feeling dizzy or weak. Use the stationary bikes on the unit. If you are unable to walk or bike, use an incentive spirometer to expand your lungs. It will not maintain muscle mass or exercise the heart, so it is important that you get back to regular exercise as soon as possible.

Keeping your skin clean and soft

Because your body cannot fight infection, it is important to keep your skin clean. Chemotherapy can make your skin dry. Use a moisturizing soap, not a deodorant soap, when you bathe. Take short baths or showers, not long ones, and don't use very hot or very cold water. Apply a good moisturizer all over your body several times a day.

High doses of the medicine AraC can cause burns, usually on the palms of your hands and soles of your feet. Using moisturizer cream every day can help prevent these burns. If your hands or feet burn or look sunburned, tell your nurse. You can get a special cream to soothe the burning and help your skin to heal.

Preventing mouth sores

Mouth sores are a common side effect of many chemotherapies. Keeping your mouth clean can help prevent the sores from becoming infected. Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush after each meal and at bedtime. If your platelet count is less than 50,000, do not use dental floss. If you notice bleeding when you brush your teeth, your nurse can give you softer toothbrushes.

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Salt and soda is a good cleanser that can be used as often as necessary to help keep your mouth clean. Mix a teaspoon salt and a teaspoon soda in a glass of water. Swish it around in your mouth and spit out.

Use the mouth cleaner Peridex every morning and evening. Swish it around in your mouth and spit it out.

Nystatin is an antifungal used to prevent or treat thrush, which is a fungus that can grow in your mouth. Swallow the dose of Nystatin to help treat the back of your mouth and your esophagus. If its taste makes you nauseated, please tell your nurse so you can try other ways prevent thrush.

Even if you are very careful, you may still get mouth sores. Be sure to tell the nursing staff if you feel a sore spot developing. Remember, you can have these sores in your throat, where you can't see them. Tell your nurse if your throat hurts or if you have trouble swallowing.

Eating healthy

Chemotherapy also affects the cells of your stomach and intestines, and it can cause nausea, vomiting, poor appetite, or diarrhea. Eating nutritious food will help your body rebuild healthy cells. You may need to eat small meals and snacks several times a day and drink nutritional supplements such as Boost or Ensure. Dietitians will visit you to make sure that you are getting enough nutrients. You can avoid nausea and vomiting by choosing bland foods that don't have a strong odor and are not hot. You can also take medicine to treat nausea.

While your white blood cell count is low, it's best to stay away from fresh vegetables and fruits. Because they are not cooked, they can have bacteria that your body cannot fight. Instead, eat frozen or canned foods during your chemotherapy.