

Side Effects

As you enter each phase of your treatment plan, it can be helpful to know what to expect so you can plan to prevent or manage treatment side effects. Below are some side effects you may or may not have.

As always, checking with your doctor first about how to manage side effects is best, but we are also including a link to The American Cancer Society for more information.

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html> (American Cancer Society Side Effects page)

Pain

Pain is a common side effect of certain breast cancer treatments. Depending on the treatment you have, the type and severity of pain will vary. For example, you may experience pain during recovery from surgery and certain hormonal therapies can be known to cause joint pain.

Lymphedema

Lymphedema can happen after breast cancer surgery or radiation therapy, especially if you have lymph nodes removed. Lymphedema is an abnormal buildup of fluid called lymph that can cause swelling, usually in the arm and hand in people who have been treated for breast cancer.

Hair loss

Hair loss is one of the most well-known side effects of chemotherapy, which can be distressing for many people. Other breast cancer treatments, such as hormonal therapy, can cause some hair loss, as well. Preparing for hair loss and knowing your options for managing it can help you feel less stressed about this treatment side effect.

Fatigue

Fatigue is the most common side effect of breast cancer treatment, affecting as many as nine out of 10 people. If treatment is making you feel tired all the time and it doesn't get

better with rest, talk to your doctor, and learn about steps you can take to help manage this side effect.

Neuropathy

Neuropathy is a potential side effect of some chemotherapy medicines that causes pain, numbness, or discomfort resulting from damage to the nerves. It usually begins in the toes and can expand to the legs, arms, and hands as treatment continues. Neuropathy can also be caused by surgery, radiation therapy, and targeted therapy medicines.

GI problems

Gastrointestinal issues are commonly caused by chemotherapy and other medicines used to treat breast cancer. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to prevent and manage these conditions.

Low white blood cell count

White blood cells are an important part of your immune system that helps your body fight infection. Some breast cancer treatments can reduce the amount of white blood cells in your body to the point that you have an increased risk of infection. Doctors call this immunocompromised.

Menopausal Symptoms

Menopausal symptoms can include hot flashes, mood swings, vaginal dryness, loss of sex drive, and other effects.

Chemo Brain

Sometimes people with cancer worry about, joke about, or become frustrated by what they describe as mental cloudiness or changes they might notice before, during, and after cancer treatment. This cloudiness or mental change is commonly referred to as chemo brain (or chemobrain).