

# Common Concerns When Starting Chemo

## What Can I Expect From Chemotherapy?

Many people have questions and concerns about what to expect. This brochure answers some common questions to help lower your anxiety and prepare you for your treatment.

You will also find some suggestions from other patients that have gone through chemotherapy. It is important to remember that your experience may be quite different, even from the experience of other people who have the same type of cancer or who are receiving the same chemo as you.

Your healthcare team is here to work with you to prevent and manage side effects. However, they can only help you if you keep them up-to-date on how you are feeling.

## Anxiety and Restlessness


*“Go in with a good attitude. Consider chemotherapy spa treatment for the insides of the body. Let the medicine cleanse your inner skin.”*

*“Don’t look at a watch or cell phone clock. Read, go online, listen to iPod, do puzzles, sleep, knit/crochet, watch TV, bring a loved one/friend to chat with you.”*

*“It is hard in the beginning, but it opens up your eyes. You begin to see the world differently.”*

Cancer and other treatments can be very stressful for you and your loved ones. It may cause you to feel anxious before, during, or even after treatment. Many times, it may feel like you cannot relax and enjoy your life as you did before treatment.

## Symptoms of Anxiety

	Constant worrying or obsession	Trouble sleeping
	Muscle aches	Fatigue or feeling tired
	Restlessness, trembling	Irritability
	Nausea/vomiting	Shortness of breath

Relaxation techniques can help calm your mind and help you mentally focus. They can help you manage anxiety, pain, and other physical symptoms that can affect your response to treatment.

For some people, they can significantly improve their quality of life. You can use the techniques below to help you relax, stay calm, and keep a clear head for making treatment decisions.

## Tips for Dealing with Anxiety and Restlessness

### Deep-Breathing Exercises

Anxiety and stress can make us take short, shallow breaths. Shallow breathing does not allow enough oxygen to enter our bodies and can make us more anxious. As you practice deep breathing, imagine a peaceful setting.

Here is a simple breathing exercise: Take in a deep breath and hold it for several seconds. Exhale slowly. Repeat 1-2 more times.

### Meditation

Repetitive prayers are a form of meditation. Choose a word that is important to you such as “peace”, “love”, or “hope”. Focus on this word and if you find your mind wandering, focus back on the word. It is best to do this in a quiet environment where there are not any distractions.

### Guided Imagery

This technique combines deep breathing and meditation. As you practice your deep breathing, imagine yourself in a peaceful setting. Continue deep breathing until you feel relaxed.

Once you are relaxed, create a “wakeful dream” in your mind. Picture your pain being washed away by a gentle rain or sitting outside on a beautiful day with your body gaining strength from the sun shining down on you.

- Try practicing these relaxation techniques while listening to music or sounds from nature.
- Express what you are feeling. Record your emotions through photography, journaling, drawing, painting, or music.
- Share your feelings with people who you trust.
- Join a support group, the online Roswell Community, or a “buddy” program – you do not have to face this alone!



Remember, it may take a bit of time and practice to reach the point where you can use these techniques successfully in high stress situations.

While you are a beginner, practice at times when your stress level is low to moderate.

If you become frustrated during a practice session, stop and try again later. By practicing these techniques regularly, you can learn to use the power of your mind to decrease anxiety, lessen discomfort, improve sleep, and increase your sense of well-being.

## Nausea & Vomiting

*“Do not be afraid to take your medications to help deal with nausea.”*

*“If you are not feeling good, tell them (your doctors and nurses) and they will give you something right away.”*

## Tips for Managing Nausea and Vomiting

Do not hesitate to tell your doctor or nurse that you are having nausea. There are medications that you can take before chemo to prevent or reduce nausea. Your doctor can prescribe medications, called anti-emetics, to help you feel better if the nausea has started.

There are many medications (and combinations of medications) that can be tried. Please be patient while your team finds which ones work best for you. Give your doctor feedback about how they are working, or if a medication no longer works for you.

- Try eating smaller meals more frequently during the day instead of 3 large meals a day.
- Eat and drink slowly.
- If you have nausea or vomiting, try clear liquids first. If they stay down, try other liquids, and then move to bland foods such as rice, applesauce, and bread.

### Important

- **You must stay hydrated during treatment.** Nausea and vomiting can lead to dehydration. Dehydration occurs when your body does not have enough water/fluids to function normally. Severe dehydration can have very serious consequences.
- Drink plenty of water and other nonalcoholic beverages. Products such as Pedialyte® will replace fluids and electrolytes such as sodium (salt) and potassium.

## Body Image



*“Hair will come back in time.”*

*“Ordering soft or pureed food helped me keep the weight on, especially when I was feeling nauseous.”*

## Tips for Dealing with Body Image

You may be worried about hair loss during chemotherapy treatment. If you do lose your hair, it may take about 6 -12 months to grow back. Sometimes new hair will grow back a different texture or color. These changes may last a short time or they may be permanent.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about getting a wig before you have lost all your hair; it will make it easier to match your natural color. Wigs are available at the Resource Cancer for Patients and Families, located inside the Sunflower Café on the first floor of the hospital. Having a wig ready before you have lost your hair can help you feel more prepared and more in control.

Some chemo medications can cause skin problems such as dry, itchy skin, rashes, acne, peeling, etc.

- Wash with a simple, detergent-free soap
- Use a gentle skin moisturizer that does not contain any alcohol products
- Use lukewarm shower for washing, showering, or bathing instead of hot water.
- If you get a rash, do not put anything on it until you have gotten permission from your doctor.



Weight changes are not a problem for all chemotherapy patients, but when they occur, they can be particularly hard for some people to handle. During treatment, you must focus on your goal. Some people lose their appetite, mouth sores can make eating difficult, and sometimes food just does not taste the same. These factors can make it a challenge to maintain your weight through treatment.

Other people struggle not to gain weight as medications make their bodies retain fluid, increase appetite, or make them too tired for physical activity.

- Discuss your weight changes with your doctor. Ask what you can do to control your weight. If you need to make changes, ask for a referral to meet with a Roswell Park dietitian.
- If the weight change affects your self-image, a support group may be helpful in learning to cope.

## Forgetfulness

*“Keep yourself entertained, read, do puzzles, or listen to music. It will help keep your mind sharp.”*

*“Close your eyes and sleep. Getting a good rest will help your memory, especially because you are woken up several times during the night.”*

During your chemo treatments, you may have new problems remembering things, trouble concentrating, or have a shorter attention span. You may feel that you are just not functioning as you used to before treatment. “Chemobrain” is a common term for these changes.

Currently the exact cause of chemobrain is unknown, but researchers are studying it in hopes of finding effective treatments.

## Symptoms of Chemobrain

- Being confused
- Memory loss
- Short attention span
- Inability to focus on daily tasks
- Having difficulty finding the right word



## Managing Chemobrain

- **Write it down.** For example, write grocery or "to-do" lists in a notebook. It may also be helpful to record highlights from a doctor's visit or lab results.
- **Use a personal planner or wall calendar.** This will help you remember appointments and important dates. Include details (time, place, what to bring).
- **Proofread or "double-check" information.** This gives you the chance to review your words so the reader will be able to understand what you want to say.
- **Minimize distractions to help stay focused.**  
Too many things are going on at once can be distracting. For example, if you are having a conversation, it may be helpful to turn off the television. Keeping your environment neat and clean may be less distracting while reducing your risk of tripping or falling.
- **Be open with family and friends.** Sharing information about what you are going through is a private decision. Yet, it can be very helpful to have the support of others through difficult times. Family and friends may help remind you of things you may have forgotten.
- **Share your symptoms with your doctor or social worker.** Since your symptoms may cause anxiety or feelings of sadness, it is important to share them with a healthcare provider.

## Services and

Roswell Park offers services and programs that can help you and your loved ones through treatment and increase your overall sense of well-being.

- **Resource Center for Patients and Family**  
The Resource Center provides a welcoming staff that offers a caring and personalized experience for patients and loved ones. The center provides general cancer information from Roswell Park clinicians and national patient and professional cancer organizations, online computers and printers, and a lending library (laptops, DVDs, etc.). The Center is located on the 1st floor of the hospital. Hours are Mon-Fri, 9:00am - 4:00pm. For more information, please call **716-845-8659**.
- **Elevate Salon**  
Make an appointment with a professional stylist for a pretreatment haircut, a wig style or trim, inpatient or outpatient head shaves, and hair donation haircuts. Located on the 1st floor of the hospital. For more information, please call **716-845-8659**.
- **Cancer Coach program**  
Our volunteer program will match you with a cancer survivor who has had a similar diagnosis and/or cancer experience to provide emotional and practical support. For more information call **716-845-4432**.
- **Roswell Park's Online Community**  
The community is a safe, supportive place where members discuss experiences and concerns, share tips, and help each other through the tough times. Find out about cancer-related events and resources

in Buffalo and participate in nationwide communities. All you need is an email address. Join us at [www.community.roswellpark.org](http://www.community.roswellpark.org)

- **Department of Supportive Care**

The **supportive and palliative** care team provides supportive care at any time after diagnosis, including patients with advanced disease who are continuing treatment. Treatment focuses on controlling symptoms and managing pain. Services include psychological and spiritual support.

- **Supportive and Palliative Care: 716-845-8214** (or ask your doctor for a referral)
- **Psychology Department: 716-845-3700**
- **Pastoral Care – Spiritual Support: 716-845-8051**
- **Cancer Pain Management:** Ask your doctor for a referral

- **Department of Social Work**

Social workers work with patients and families on the many challenges a cancer diagnosis can bring. They can assist with translation services, transportation, local accommodations, and more. Consultations and services are free and confidential. For more information, please call **716-845-8022**.

- **Smoking Cessation**

It is never too late to quit smoking. Smoke-free cancer patients feel better during and after treatment and have a better chance of recovery. Classes are free and a new series begins every 6 weeks. For more information, call **716-845-1300** and dial extension **7851**.

- **Nutrition and Registered Dietitian Services**

All of Roswell Park's clinical dietitians are Registered Dietitians (RD), credentialed by the American Dietetic Association, and they are a part of your medical team. They can help if you are dealing with nutrition issues due to your cancer diagnosis or treatment. If you would like to meet with a registered dietitian, please ask your doctor or nurse for a referral.

- **Survivorship & Supportive Care Center**

The survivorship center offers comprehensive services and Care Plans for patients who have completed their active cancer treatment and are ready to move to a higher level of wellness as a cancer survivor. They help detect and manage complication or side effects from your disease or treatment and restore your body and soul with rehabilitative therapy, nutrition counseling, and emotional support and guidance. To make an appointment for consultation, please call **716-845-4800**.

- **LegalCare at Roswell Park**

Current patients and their families are eligible for the first free, confidential legal consultation. Depending on the results, you may also qualify for free or discounted legal services. To make an appointment with LegalCare, call

**716-845-1300** and dial extension **6475** or email [LegalCare@RoswellPark.org](mailto:LegalCare@RoswellPark.org).

These are some of the support services that are available to you and your caregivers. Please call **716-834-2300** or toll-free **1-800-ROSWELL (1-800-767-9355)** for information about Roswell Park and the services available here and in the community.

Roswell Park's online Patient Education Library has additional materials that you may find helpful.

- **Roswell Park website:** [www.roswellpark.org](http://www.roswellpark.org)
- **Patient Education Library** (searchable): Click on "Patients" in the blue bar at the top left of the page: <https://www.roswellpark.org/current-patients/patient-education>
- **Taking the Lead - Wellness During Drug Therapy:** <https://www.roswellpark.org/pted.php?pemID=PE1578>
- **Resources and Support:** <https://www.roswellpark.org/pted.php?pemID=PE1515o>

These are some of the support services that are available to you and your caregivers. Please call **1-800-ROSWELL (1-800-767-9355)** or e-mail [askroswell@roswellpark.org](mailto:askroswell@roswellpark.org) for information about Roswell Park and the services available here and in the community.

Even the thought of beginning chemotherapy treatment may be overwhelming. There are many different feelings and emotions that you may experience over the upcoming months. It is perfectly normal to feel a whirl of emotions such as sadness, anger, and frustration about the disease and the side effects of chemotherapy.

Therefore, it is very important to develop good communication with family members, friends, and your health care team to help you deal with your experiences and the emotions that come along with them.

This resource was compiled to remind you that you are not alone; but your experience is unique. If you have any questions or concerns, please know the Roswell Park staff is here to guide and support you.

