

MANAGING CHEMOTHERAPY SIDE EFFECTS

ANEMIA

These are general guidelines only and are not intended to replace talking with your health care providers. Be sure to tell your doctor or nurse about any side effects that you notice.

What is anemia?

Anemia is a common condition in people living with cancer. Anemia happens when your red blood cell count or hemoglobin level is lower than normal. There are three main types of cells in your blood: white blood cells, red blood cells and platelets. Red blood cells contain hemoglobin, which carries oxygen from your lungs to your body tissues. When your red blood cell count or hemoglobin level is low, body tissues don't get enough oxygen to do their jobs properly. Your cancer, chemotherapy or radiation treatments, or other medical conditions may cause low red blood cell counts.

How will I know if I am anemic? (If my hemoglobin level is low)

The only real way to know if you are anemic is to have a blood test. A low hemoglobin count will mean you have anemia.

What might I feel like if I have anemia?

You may:

- Feel weak, listless with low energy levels and have trouble starting or finishing tasks
- Feel the need to sleep during the day
- Feel dizzy, lightheaded or possibly having a headache.
- Feel pain in your chest or a fluttery feeling from your heart
- Have difficulty concentrating and remembering
- Feel tired and having less energy most of the time
- Be short of breath or breathless after very little activity
- Have pale skin colour, pale lips and fingernail beds
- Have ringing or pounding in the ears
- Be very sensitive to cold temperature, feeling cold when others do not

- Have a sore mouth or tongue
- Have a poor appetite
- Have less interest in social activities or seeing people
- Feeling down or irritable.
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- Be feeling down, or irritable.

HELPFUL TIPS IF YOU FEEL TIRED

Save your energy

- Choose the most important things to do each day.

Ask for help

- When family or friends offer to help, let them. They can take you to the doctor, buy groceries or make meals.

Balance rest with activity

- Take short naps during the day. Short naps of less than 1 hour are best. Too much bed rest can make you feel weak.
- Try to sleep at about 8 hours every night.
- You may feel better if you take a short walk or exercise a little every day.

Eat and drink well

- Talk with your doctor or nurse to learn what foods and drinks are best for you. Ask to talk to a dietitian.
- You may need to eat high-protein foods. Meat, peanut butter and eggs are good choices.
- You may need to eat foods with iron. Red meat, leafy greens (such as collard greens and spinach) and cooked dried beans are good choices.
- Drink tea or coffee between meals rather than with meals, as they reduce the amount of iron that is absorbed.
- Most people need to drink at least 8 cups of liquid every day. Water and juice with extra water are good choices.



Other tips if you have anemia

- If you are feeling light headed, dizzy or faint feeling when you sit or stand up, take plenty of time to change your position. Getting up too quickly can make this worse and cause a lightheaded or faint feeling.
- Do not drive a car or operate heavy machinery if you are feeling faint or lightheaded or if you feel sleepy.
- You should not smoke when you have anemia. Smoking can make your symptoms worse. Try to cut down the number of cigarettes you have or stop smoking altogether. Ask your doctor about a smoking cessation plan.
- Do not have a bath or shower when home alone, in case of lightheaded spells, dizziness or shortness of breath

What should I do if I notice symptoms?

Contact your doctor or nurse as soon as possible if you are experiencing symptoms of anemia. You may need to have your hemoglobin count checked. You may need a transfusion of red blood cells or medications to treat the anemia.

