

NAUSEA AND LOSS OF APPETITE

As cancer progresses, your body wages an escalating battle. The side effects of the effort may mean fever, achyness, “the blahs,” and lack of interest in food. These symptoms may be caused by medication. If so, changing medication could solve the problem.

Loss of appetite and increased nausea may also mean that the cancer is overwhelming the body’s ability to process food.

Whether medicine or cancer is causing the problem, talk to your doctor.

Palliative measures

Good nutrition is important in dealing with illness. If large meals do not appeal to you, try several small meals or snacks during the day. Milk shakes, smoothies with protein powder or yogurt, trail mixes or health food bars and drinks may provide better nutrition and be easier for your body to handle than steak or bacon and eggs. You can make these snacks at home or buy them ready-to-eat.

Sometimes lack of interest in food is a side effect of lethargy. You are just too tired to be hungry. At those times, a simple snack may perk up both your energy and your spirits. Or, you may need to deal with tiredness by using oxygen or getting a blood transfusion.

Some foods, such as ginger, can lessen nausea. Ginger snap cookies, made with real ginger, are good to have on hand at home or while traveling. On the other hand, the mere smell of food may provoke nausea, as may the sight of a table or plate heaped high with food.

Both you and your caregiver must remember that loss of appetite is normal. Food should be available but *you should not force yourself to eat.*

Doctors can prescribe effective nausea medications in many forms, from suppositories to fast-acting gels that are rubbed onto your arm. These may be taken as needed or on a regular basis to prevent nausea.

A gel, called BDR, can be made of 50 mg. Benedryl (an antihistamine),

4 mg. of Decadron (a steroid) and 40 mg. of Reglan (an antiemetic). The three medicines are compounded into a topical gel or suppositories. The combination is effective and fast-acting for many people. The gel is portable and easy to use. It can be taken anywhere and discreetly applied where and when needed.

Insurance may not pay for BDR because it has not been approved in this form. Your doctor can prescribe each component separately and instruct the pharmacist to mix them.

Lifestyle considerations

Instead of scheduling three big meals each day, it may be better to eat several small meals. That may require taking food along on trips or visits.

Small containers of applesauce, pudding and cheese-and-cracker snacks are available at most supermarkets, usually in the section for school lunches. Trail mix, nuts or health bars can be stashed in the glove compartment or “survival” bag in the car. Your survival bag should also have ginger cookies and anti-nausea medicine, along with your pain medicine.

When you eat out, you and your partner may decide to split one entrée instead of ordering two full meals. Sometimes an appetizer makes a meal.

Or you can take part of the meal home for an easy lunch the next day.

If you don't feel like eating at all, you may want to set a timer to remind you to eat something, even if it is only a snack or glass of juice. This may prevent missing meals due to tiredness or lethargy. Having something to eat, however small, may restore your energy and even make you ready to eat something more substantial.

Simple foods may be more appealing and easier to digest than spicy or fatty foods. They may also be easier for your caregiver to prepare. Don't try to live up to other people's expectation. Friends may want to show their affection by preparing your once-favorite foods. Explain that your tastes have changed: Forcing yourself to eat what your body does not want will cause nausea and vomiting.

To prevent nausea, take smaller portions on a small plate. If the sight of food makes you nauseated, look at a picture on the wall or leave the table until the feeling passes. Get a prescription for anti-nausea medication, such as the gel. Take the medication with you wherever you go, especially when you go out to eat.

Remember, eat what you want, when you want it.

HOSPICE

To many, hospice sounds like the place you go when you can no longer function, when you are bedridden and within days of death.

Not so.

Hospice is a service designed to maintain the highest possible quality of life for you, keep you in your home and ease the burdens carried by both you and your caregiver.

Calling hospice is not a sign of giving up; it is a sign that you want to make informed decisions about your care. It is an acknowledgment that help is needed to deal with the effects of your disease on your lifestyle and your family.

Many people contact hospice while they still are able to work, travel and enjoy other activities. The hospice staff can offer advice and equipment to maintain your quality of life, as well as offer spiritual and emotional support.

Hospice provides nurses, social workers, physical therapists, health aides, chaplains and time off for caregivers. They help with many problems, from making a will to getting a wheelchair, from easing the side effects of medicine to getting medicine delivered to your home, from administering medicine to giving you a foot massage.

Many communities have hospice programs that cooperate with each other. When you travel, hospice may be able to arrange a wheelchair or emergency contacts at your destination.

Hospice staff and volunteers relieve you and your family of the little things that become tiring and time-wasting tasks, such as driving to the pharmacy or getting approval for medical equipment. The hospice staff can answer questions about the side effects of medicine, suggest solutions and help you make decisions about legal and medical issues before problems arise.

It is your life, to the last moment.

Live it the way you want to.

An occupational therapist may suggest changes in your home that make independence easier, such as grab bars in the shower or tools to help you put on shoes and socks. The therapist may notice obstacles, such as throw rugs and tripping hazards. These changes may prevent a fall and broken bones that could severely reduce your quality of life.

Because hospice deals constantly with many of the symptoms and problems you are experiencing, the staff has come up with creative solutions and will brainstorm new ones with you. Whether you use the suggestions is up to you. Hospice also benefits caregivers and family members. Nurses and social workers will help them understand your medications and the kind of help you really need.

Some doctors are slow to refer patients to hospice, perhaps because doing so is an admission that a cure

is not forthcoming or because they feel that the hope of a long life or a cure is psychologically valuable to patients.

Hope is important; so is having all the tools you need to maintain your quality of life.

Ask for a referral or call hospice yourself. Then you will have the information you need to decide if and when you want the extra help.

The most immediate benefit of hospice is help with the lifestyle changes discussed in the previous sections: wheelchairs; medication for nausea; tools to help when muscle tone and range-of-motion lessen; pain control techniques, from medication delivery systems to visualization; and creative solutions to individual problems.

With the experience and support of hospice staff, the last months of life can be active, enriching and enjoyable.

It is your life, to the last moment.
Live it the way you want to.

RESOURCES

Books

- *Morrie: In His Own Words*, by Morrie Schwartz, Walker and Company 1996
- *How We Die*, by Sherwin B. Nuland, M.D., Alfred A. Knopf, 1994
- *Going the Distance*, by George Sheehan, M.D., Villard Books, 1996

Internet

Many organizations provide information about treatments, both conventional and alternative; clinical trials; financial assistance and insurance issues; and coping with cancer. Among them are:

- American Cancer Society 1.800.ACS.2345 / www.cancer.org
- Cancer Care, 1.800.813.HOPE / www.cancercareinc.org
- National Cancer Institute 1.800.4CANCER / www.cancernet.nci.nih.gov

Other Internet sources of information and inspiration are:

- www.psa-rising.com
- www.prostatepointers.org
- www.cancerfacts.com

These are, of course, just a few of the many resources at your disposal. They are included because we found them particularly helpful. Talk to people, go online, browse a bookstore – find the support and information that works for you.

For additional free copies of this booklet, please contact Rotary Clubs of District 5190, 11250 Rosemary Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 or Molly Sugarman at msugarman@jps.net / 530.823.0184.



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