

CANSA Care Month

Coping with cancer treatment side effects



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Coping with a cancer diagnosis

In August CANSA highlights its service offering to cancer patients, caregivers and loved ones, in particular regarding coping with a diagnosis as well as managing side effects of cancer treatment, whether physical, or psychological.

- CANSA gives some top tips for dealing with common side effects related to nutrition, as well as nutritious, affordable recipes for patients undergoing treatment
- Further dietary tips about coping with constipation, nausea, diarrhoea and loss of appetite are available
- CANSA also recommends that survivors speak to a healthcare professional for individualised advice



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Coping with a cancer diagnosis

- It's important for survivors undergoing treatment to consume a variety of foods in order for their bodies to take in sufficient nutrients to fight cancer
- Good nutrition leads to increased strength and energy, lowers risk for infection and helps patients maintain an appropriate weight
- An added complication is that cancer treatment may affect the manner in which the body tolerates food and makes use of nutrients, which may also vary during and after treatment
- For this reason we recommend that if possible, survivors consult with a registered dietician if they are experiencing problems related to diet



Coping with cancer treatment side effects

CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Nausea

- This common side effect can be treated with drugs called antiemetics, which are usually taken before treatment to help control nausea and vomiting
- It's important to find the reason for your nausea – treatment, the cancer itself, dental problems or perhaps a change in sugar levels
- Sometimes being very hungry can also make you feel nauseous. Be sure to tell your cancer care team if you have nausea because there are medicines that can help
- The general principle for managing nausea is to follow a bland diet



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CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Nausea

- Eat and drink small, regular meals and snacks (5-6 times per day)
- After eating, rest in upright position
- Avoid fatty, oily foods
- Avoid a too-full stomach and wear loose fitting clothes
- Drink slowly and between meals, not with meals
- Suck on frozen juice cubes
- Find something to distract you
- Ask someone else to prepare your food
- Try ginger/mint tea, lemonade, ginger ale, ginger beer, food cooked with ginger
- Avoid caffeine (e.g. coffee) and smoking



Coping with cancer treatment side effects

CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Loss of appetite

- Loss of appetite is a very common problem
- There are many reasons for this, including the cancer itself, treatment, your emotional wellbeing (e.g. depression), pain and other side effects, like nausea
- Certain drugs are available to stimulate the appetite, but you should consult your healthcare professional for individual advice
- Try to eat more when you feel at your best. Most people can eat more at breakfast than later in the day when they are more tired
- Do light, regular exercise, e.g. walking



Coping with cancer treatment side effects

CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Loss of appetite

- Eat slowly and chew food well
- Eat food you feel like and don't force yourself to eat
- If you are undergoing any cancer treatment or your immunity is low (compromised), rather opt for only well-cooked foods (avoid raw meats and sushi)
- Avoid greasy, fatty, not as nutritious foods that will make you feel full more quickly
- Liquids (smoothies/shake) are better tolerated
- Gradually add more food with each meal
- Consume liquids after meals, not with meals



Coping with cancer treatment side effects

CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Loss of appetite

- Take liquid nutritional supplements that will help to increase your protein and energy intake (speak to your healthcare professional for individual advice)
- Ask your doctor if you can drink some wine/sherry before eating to help stimulate appetite
- Dark chocolate can stimulate appetite
- Eat in a calm, comfortable atmosphere
- Ask for help in preparing and cooking food
- Cook and freeze food for easy reheating
- Perform regular mouth care to reduce unpleasant aftertastes



Coping with cancer treatment side effects

CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Diarrhoea

- Diarrhoea is the passing of loose stools (not formed and watery) frequently (more than three times a day). The food moves through the gut too quickly and does not get a chance to be digested or absorbed
- When you are undergoing cancer treatment, side effects such as vomiting or diarrhoea can lead to dehydration. Infections, high fever, bleeding or merely not drinking enough fluids also can lead to dehydration
- Dehydration is a serious condition and can be life-threatening if left untreated



Coping with cancer treatment side effects

CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Diarrhoea

- In the case of acute diarrhoea (lasting less than 2 weeks) symptoms come on suddenly but usually clear up within 5-10 days
- Chronic diarrhoea is diarrhoea that lasts for more than four weeks
- Should you suspect that you have chronic diarrhoea, consult your healthcare professional. Medication might be necessary but the dietary advice stays the same
- Other factors that can lead to diarrhoea, e.g. food sensitivity, depression, anxiety, infection, too much sugar and lactose intolerance



Coping with cancer treatment side effects

CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Diarrhoea

- Total food abstinence/avoidance is not recommended
- Foods at room temperature may be better tolerated
- Take frequent sips of clear fruit juice, sports beverages, black tea, flat carbonated beverages and ice lollies. Drink liquids between meals
- Soft, easily digested foods (bananas, apple sauce, rice, potatoes, noodles, crackers, toast, soup) are usually better tolerated
- Eat small amounts of food frequently
- Dairy products should be avoided. Try lactose-free milk and yoghurt or soya milk and soya products, as lactose intolerance can develop due to the diarrhoea



Coping with cancer treatment side effects

CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Diarrhoea

- Fatty foods and highly spiced foods may not be well tolerated
- Potassium is an important mineral for the body, try to eat some foods that are high in potassium, such as ripe bananas, avocado, apricot, or peaches, and potatoes
- If you have cramps, avoid consuming foods that may produce gas, such as carbonated drinks, beer, dried beans (legumes), cabbage, broccoli, garlic, cauliflower, highly spiced foods and chewing gum
- Avoid foods/juices that have a laxative effect, such as prunes and prune juice



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CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Diarrhoea

- Eat well-cooked, tender meats, such as tender cuts of baked, grilled or roasted beef, lamb, liver and pork as well as chicken, fish and peanut butter
- Avoid pips and skins of fruit and vegetables, seeded bread and rolls, whole-wheat kernels, nuts and dried fruit
- Be careful of products containing artificial sweeteners sorbitol and xylitol

Home-made rehydration solution

½ teaspoon salt and 8 teaspoons sugar diluted in 1 litre boiled, cooled water. Try to drink 125–250 ml after each loose stool



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CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Constipation

- Unfortunately many pain medications can cause constipation. The stools are hard, and difficult and painful to pass
- Stressful situations may also lead to constipation. Fear of pain and discomfort when going to the toilet will worsen the problem
- When you experience constipation and push too hard, it can lead to haemorrhoids (piles)
- Following a modified diet, e.g. a clear fluid diet, for too long may also lead to constipation, due to the low dietary fibre content
- A lack of exercise is also a factor that may contribute to this problem



Coping with cancer treatment side effects

CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Constipation

- Drink at least 6–10 glasses of water a day
- Follow a diet high in soluble and insoluble dietary fibre, e.g. fresh fruit, vegetables with skin, whole-wheat bread, dried beans, lentils, dried fruit or stewed dried fruit, brown rice, digestive/oat bran, oats
- Ask your healthcare professional whether stool softeners/laxatives might be suitable for you with your medication
- Eat at regular times and try to increase your physical activity if possible
- Fruit smoothies are high in dietary fibre



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CANSA's Top Dietary Tips

Constipation

- If you follow a high-fibre diet without drinking enough water, the constipation might get worse
- Avoid caffeine in the form of coffee and tea, for example, as caffeine has a diuretic effect and can aggravate constipation. Rooibos tea* is caffeine-free
- Follow a regular bowel movement routine. Do not sit for too long or push too hard
- Consult your registered dietitian about nutritional supplements and to recommend a high-energy, high-protein, fibre-containing liquid supplement if required

*Please speak to your healthcare professional for individualised advice

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How CANSA is making a difference

At our CANSA Care Centres we provide holistic care and support to you and your loved ones, from the time of diagnosis, through all phases of need:

- Support groups
- Individual counselling
- Medical loan equipment
- Breast prostheses & wigs
- Acute and chronic wound care
- Stoma care
- Nutritional supplements
- Community-based cancer care programmes
- CANSA care homes
- CANSA TLC, support for children, teens & families
- CANSA supports survivors online
- Fact sheets & coping kit
- Multi-lingual info service and WhatsApp lines



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What can you do to help?

Help CANSA expand its support programmes, please consider making a donation at any of our CANSA Care Centres country-wide or Online at

<http://www.cansa.org.za/personal-donation-options/>

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