

# North Star Lodge Patient Education Handbook



Memorial’s Comprehensive Cancer Care Line is integrated across multiple departments and facilities; comprising a full spectrum of services including diagnostic imaging, surgery, medical and radiation oncology services, medication infusions, and support services.



Family of Services

**Personal Health Manager**

Your personal health manager folder is a resource for you to store and record your diagnosis, treatment and educational materials. This booklet has information specific to your treatment at North Star Lodge and Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital Family of Services. Please keep this booklet in your folder for reference and take your entire folder with you when you see your providers, visit the emergency room, or travel out of the area. It will become a record of all that you do and learn as you go through the process of treatment. We welcome your suggestions for additional content and educational materials.

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### Contact my provider

If you need to contact your provider, please call the main number at North Star Lodge 509-574-3400; Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. (except on holidays). Ask to speak with the triage nurse. You may be asked to leave a message which is most often returned within the hour but always same day. Weekends, Evenings or Holidays: For urgent issues after hours that cannot wait until the next business day, you can contact the on-call provider. The providers rotate call on a weekly basis. An answering service will take information from you and have the provider return your call. Have your treatment information available (i.e. treatment drugs, last treatment date, etc.)

### Unusual Symptoms

If you develop any of the following symptoms, you may have a serious condition that needs to be treated. The nurse/provider will help determine if you should be seen. Please do not come to the clinic without an appointment - call first so you are given the appropriate instructions first.

- Fever higher than 100.5 degrees (if you are currently on chemotherapy)

- Note- wait 30 minutes after ingesting cold or hot fluid/food or chewing gum to take temp

- Shaking chills

- Vomiting that is not being managed by your anti-nausea medications

- Excessive bleeding or bruising

- Shortness of breath/chest pain (if you have extreme chest pain, call 911)

- Severe constipation or diarrhea

- Painful or frequent urination

- Blood in the stool or urine

- Soreness, redness, swelling, pus or drainage at your IV catheter site

- Pain in a new place or pain that is not relieved by your pain medication

- Inability to eat and continued weight loss

- Mouth sores

- One or more of the following symptoms in combination with repetitive diarrhea or vomiting (sign of dehydration)

  - Dry, cracked lips or dry, sticky tongue

  - Increased thirst

  - Decreased urination

  - Increased weakness

  - Increased pulse rate

  - Dizziness/lightheadedness (especially when rising to a standing position)

- Painful leg swelling - especially if only on one side

- Extreme fatigue

- Rash or redness on your skin

- New onset of irregular or rapid heartbeat

- Headache that is not relieved by over-the-counter medications

- Nasal congestion, drainage, coughs

- Numbness or tingling in hands or feet

For any scheduling questions please call 574-3474 and your call will be returned during business hours.

## **Cancer medications and treatment**

There are several types of medications used to cure or control cancer. Each month more and more drugs are being developed that fight cancer in different ways.

### **Chemotherapy**

Chemotherapy is the use of drugs for cancer treatment. Your oncology provider refers to drugs that are cytotoxic (cell killing) as chemotherapy. Chemotherapy can affect cancer cells and normal cells. Chemotherapy drugs act on any rapidly dividing cells in the body. The normal cells most often affected by chemotherapy are in the bone marrow, gastrointestinal tract, reproductive system, and hair follicles. Most normal cells recover quickly when treatment ends.

### **Targeted Cancer Therapy**

Research has led to the better understanding of how cancer cells are different from normal cells. As a result, medicines that target these small differences have been developed. These are referred to as targeted therapy drugs. These drugs work in a different way than traditional chemotherapy. Targeted therapy drugs go after the cancer cells' inner workings - the programming that sets them apart from normal healthy cells. These drugs tend to have different (and often less severe) side effects than traditional chemotherapy drugs.

### **Immunotherapy**

Immunotherapy is treatment that uses certain parts of a person's immune system to fight diseases such as cancer. Some drugs can stimulate your own immune system to work harder or smarter to attack cancer cells. Also, some man-made immune system proteins can be given to assist your immune system in fighting diseases. Sometimes immunotherapy is referred to as biologic therapy or biotherapy.

### **Hormonal Therapy**

Some cancers use natural hormones in our bodies to grow. Hormone therapy for cancer is the use of medicines to block the effects of hormones. Providers use hormone therapy for people with cancers that are hormone sensitive or hormone dependent. Cancers that are hormone sensitive or hormone dependent need hormones to grow or develop. Hormone therapies can slow down or stop the growth of cancer by either stopping hormones being made or preventing hormones from making cancer cells grow and divide.

## Tips for your Chemotherapy Infusion Days

**Food and Drinks:** The snacks and drinks in the infusion area are provided mostly by donations and are available for patients only. You are welcome to bring your own food and drinks to your infusion appointments.

**Clothing:** Dressing in layers is recommended and/or bringing a blanket from home. You may feel cool during your infusion and we do provide extra blankets and pillows for your comfort.

**Rides:** It is necessary to have someone drive you to and from your infusion appointments because you may receive medicines that cause drowsiness. We will provide assistance in arranging rides if needed.

**Nausea prevention:** Many chemotherapy regimens can cause nausea. Medicines to prevent nausea will be given during your treatment. Your provider will prescribe medication to take at home if you experience nausea after treatment

**Patients are sensitive to odors; this includes strong smelling foods, cologne, lotions and perfumes which are discouraged as they can worsen nausea.**

**Visitors:** You may bring one support person to sit with you during your infusion. There is limited space in the infusion suite.

**Children:** Children are not allowed in the infusion area for safety reasons. Our social worker can help arrange child care if your options are limited.

### **Important information for chemotherapy patients:**

Some chemotherapy agents may weaken your immune system and make you more susceptible to infection. Avoid being around people who have colds or infections while on chemotherapy. Do not take aspirin or aspirin-containing products or products such as ibuprofen, Motrin, Advil or Aleve without checking with your provider or nurse first as these medications can interfere with blood clotting and may increase bruising or bleeding. Check the labels of all over-the-counter drugs. Let your provider or nurse know what over-the-counter medications you take.

### **Chemotherapy treatment cycles**

In general, chemotherapy treatment is given in cycles. This allows the cancer cells to be attacked at their most vulnerable times, and allows the body's normal cells time to recover from the damage. There are really three issues regarding the cycle time, duration of the cycle, frequency of the cycle, and how many cycles.

**Duration of the cycle:** Chemotherapy treatment may be a single drug or a combination of drugs. The drugs may all be given on a single day, several consecutive days, or continuously as an outpatient or as an inpatient. Treatment could last minutes, hours or days, depending on the specific protocol.

**Frequency of the cycle:** Chemotherapy may repeat weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. Usually, a cycle is defined in monthly intervals. For example, two bi-weekly chemotherapy sessions may be classified as one cycle.

**The number of cycles:** In most cases, the number of cycles - or the length of chemotherapy from start to finish - has been determined by research and clinical trials.

Insert any Patient Information you're given for chemotherapy medications in your personal health manager folder along with your chemotherapy treatment plan.

## Chemotherapy instructions for home

It is important to drink 2-3 quarts of fluid for 2-3 days after your treatment. This helps in washing the medicines out of your body. The fluids can include water, juice, broth, Jell-O, coffee, tea, pop or soda, and ice cream. You want to taper down the amount you drink after 2-3 days, unless instructed otherwise by your physician. Mouth care is important to keep the oral cavity clean. This care consists of the following:

Clean your teeth and tongue using a soft toothbrush.

Look in your mouth for any white, furry/fuzzy areas or for sores. These sores may be like a cold sore. If you see any, call your physician right away.

Rinse your mouth with baking soda rinse after meals and before bedtime. If you know your white count is low, you can rinse every 2-3 hours throughout the day.

Mix your baking soda rinse with 1 tsp of baking soda in 1 pint of water.  
(This could be 1 tsp in an 8 oz glass.)

Commercial mouthwash is not an acceptable alternative, as it will dry your mouth out.

Nausea and/or vomiting should be treated with your prescribed medications from your physician. It may be helpful to take these medications routinely as they are ordered for 2-3 days after a treatment. Call your physician if the nausea or vomiting continues.

Temperature elevations need to be noted. Taking your temperature in the morning and evening is recommended. You want to call your physician if your temperature is at or over 100.5°, or if chills occur.

Other symptoms should be treated as you normally would. If the symptoms persist longer than 24 hours, call your physician.

Care of body fluids is important for your family for a few days after your treatment. If this is a chemotherapy treatment that is given daily, these precautions are in place as long as you are taking your medication.

Flush the toilet twice each time you use it.

Wear gloves when the toilet is cleaned.

Do not allow pets to drink from the toilet.

If the person taking chemotherapy is incontinent, wash linens and clothing separately from other household laundry using your regular detergent.

Have children avoid holding the soiled laundry.

Notice the area where an IV site was for your chemotherapy. If unusual redness, bruising, or pain occurs, call your physician immediately.

## **Bruising and Bleeding**

Occasionally chemotherapy or radiation treatment can cause a temporary reduction of platelets, which are the cells in your blood that control clotting. This can result in:

**Bruising:** dark purple areas under the skin.

Petechiae: pinpoint-sized non-raised, round purple or red spots.

**Bleeding:** excessive or prolonged bleeding from any opening in the body (mouth, nose, gums, etc.) or from cuts or scratches, urine or stool.

### **You can protect yourself from unnecessary bleeding by:**

- Using an electric shaver instead of a razor.

- Wearing gloves while gardening.

- Taking special care when using sharp objects such as knives, scissors and pins.

- Brushing with a very soft toothbrush.

- Avoiding the use of dental floss.

- Always wearing slippers or shoes when walking about.

- Avoiding aspirin and products containing aspirin (Tylenol is okay).

- Avoiding sports or other rigorous activities with the potential for bodily injury.

- Not using power tools.

- Using sanitary napkins instead of tampons. Report an unusually heavy flow.

- Putting a clean cloth over the site if you cut yourself and applying pressure for five minutes.

- Checking with your physician before having any dental work done, including cleaning.

- Applying pressure for five minutes to puncture sites after having blood drawn or an intravenous (IV)

- needle removed and raising that arm high for a few minutes to allow a clot to form.

## **Mucous Membranes**

Mucous membranes in the throat, mouth, vagina and rectum can become very fragile during treatment. You can protect them from being damaged by:

- Drinking plenty of fluids.

- Using stool softeners daily.

- Avoiding straining when having bowel movements.

- Not using an enema without your provider's approval.

- Avoiding hard nose blowing.

- Humidifying the air.

- Using lotion on your skin.

- Moistening lips and nose with Vaseline or lip balm.

- Using a water-soluble lubricant prior to sexual intercourse.

## Blood and Blood Counts

*Your blood is made up of three types of cells:* white, red and platelets. Each cell type performs many specific jobs in keeping you healthy, and each can be an indicator of how your body is reacting not only to cancer but to the therapy being used to fight the disease.

Some anti-cancer drugs affect the bone marrow, decreasing its ability to produce blood cells. The white blood cells help fight infection. They can be commonly affected by chemotherapy. White blood cells are produced in the bone marrow to help protect your body by fighting infection. If the number of white cells in your blood is reduced, there is a higher risk of getting an infection.

During the course of your therapy, the provider will closely watch your blood cell count. If the white cell count becomes too low, your provider may want to postpone treatment or give a lower dose of anti-cancer drugs. If you have a reduced white cell count, it is very important to prevent infection by washing your hands often, avoiding crowds or people who have contagious illnesses, and preventing breaks in your skin from shaving or scratching.

Red blood cells carry oxygen to all parts of your body. When your red blood cell count is low, which is referred to as anemia, your body tissues may not get enough oxygen to do their work. With anemia, you may feel tired, dizzy or chilly or become short of breath. Be sure to report any of these symptoms to your provider. If your red cell count gets too low, your provider may want you to have blood transfusions to build up the red blood cell count.

Platelets help to make your blood clot so that bleeding stops when you hurt yourself. If there are not enough platelets in your blood, you may bleed or bruise more easily than usual, even from a minor injury. If your platelet count gets too low, you may need a transfusion of platelets. Be sure to tell your provider if you are bruising easily or if you have red spots under the skin. Also, report any unusual bleeding, such as from the gums or nose. The provider can tell you what signs to look for to detect blood in your urine or stool.

| White Cells Fight Infections                                    | Red Cells Carry Oxygen | Platelets Control Bleeding |
|---|------------------------|----------------------------|
| IF YOUR BONE MARROW IS NOT PRODUCING ENOUGH CELLS YOU MAY HAVE: |                        |                            |
| An Infection  | May feel out of breath | Gums may bleed             |
| A sore mouth  | Feel weak or tired     | May notice bruising        |
| Anemia  | Nose bleeds            | Blood in urine or stool    |
| TREATMENTS INCLUDE:   |                        |                            |
| Prevent infection   | Transfuse blood        | Prevent bleeding           |
| Injections (Neupogen)   | Injections (Epogen)    | Transfuse platelets        |
| REPORT TO PROVIDER OR NURSE IF:                                 |                        |                            |
| Fever is over 100.5 degrees                                     | Felling out of breath  | Nosebleed not stopping     |
| Excess cough or sputum production                               | Increasing weakness    | Blood in stool             |
| Burning with urination  |                        | Urine is cloudy            |

Call your provider if you have any new or unusual symptoms, or if you have been asked to call about a particular symptom. 509-574-3400



## Bowel Health

Constipation, difficulty passing stool, is a common problem for patients with cancer and patients taking regular doses of pain medication. It is recommended that you have a bowel movement at least every 2 to 3 days. If this does not happen, we have some suggestions for you to follow. This includes the use of fiber, stool softeners, and laxatives. It is important to know when each is appropriate. Using pain medications on a routine basis makes the bowels work slower; and usually laxatives are needed, not just extra bulk. Stool softeners are usually used when enough liquids are not being taken to keep the stool soft. If you do need stool softeners or laxatives, the majority are over-the-counter and do not require a prescription.

### Increasing your fiber intake

Fiber can be added to your diet to add extra bulk to the stool if you are able to eat most foods. This can be done in the following ways:

Add more bran to your diet by eating bran flakes, bran muffins, wheat germ, etc.

Drink 4-8 ounces of prune juice a day, or more if needed. Warm prune juice is more effective. Fruit paste is another option to use.

Drink 2-3 quarts of liquid a day. This alone generally will not be enough, however, to allow bowel movements for patients who are on routine pain medications.

### Fruit Paste Recipe

4 ounces pitted prunes • 4 ounces raisins • 4 ounces figs  
1 cup Senna tea • 1/4 cup brown sugar • 1/4 cup lemon juice

In a pan combine fruit and tea, boil for 5 minutes or until softened. Remove from heat, add sugar and lemon juice, and allow to cool. In a blender or food processor, blend until smooth. Place in a covered container, store in refrigerator or freezer. Take 1-2 tablespoons per day.

### Using stool softener and laxatives

We recommend starting at step 1 and advance as needed if you do not have a bowel movement within 24 hours. If an effective regimen is found, it can be continued as long as you are on pain medication or until diarrhea develops. If diarrhea does occur, hold laxatives until symptoms resolve, and then start at step 1 again.

#### Step 1

Docusate Sodium 240 or 250 mg stool softener. Take 1-2 capsules two times a day as needed  
Senokot-S (a stool softener and laxative combination). Take 1-2 tablets two times a day as needed.

#### Step 2

Add Miralax: Dissolve 17 grams (1 capful) in a glass (8 oz.) of water or juice daily.

Add Milk of Magnesia: Take 30-60 mL (1-2 ounces) 1-3 times a day. Onset of action 2-8 hours.

If no bowel movement after 3 doses, proceed to step 3

**Step 3**

Increase Senokot-S: Take 3-4 tablets two to three times a day as needed.

Or

Bisacodyl 5 mg 1-2 tablets daily as needed.

Bisacodyl 10 mg suppositories daily

Or

Lactulose: Take 15 - 30 ml (1-2 Tablespoons) either straight, or mix in water, juice or food twice daily. This is a prescription laxative that may take 1 to 2 days to work-caution with renal insufficiency.

**After 4 days, contact your provider for further instructions before continuing to step 4.****Step 4**

Magnesium Citrate liquid. Add 8oz. to cold water, juice, or carbonated beverage.

Usually works in 1-2 hours.

Or

Bisacodyl 10 mg rectal suppository: Increase (with physician approval) to 3-4 suppositories after breakfast

Or

Fleet (sodium phosphate) enema 1 dose = 1 enema (4.5 oz.), may repeat.

**Do not use if bowels are obstructed or you have a low platelet count or absolute neutrophil count (ANC).**

**Diarrhea** - Diarrhea is the passage of loose or watery stools three or more times a day. Diarrhea may happen with or without abdominal discomfort. It can be caused when water in your intestine stops being reabsorbed into your body. Sometimes it is caused by bacteria or viral infections or as the side effect of chemotherapy, radiation therapy, medications or even anxiety.

Diarrhea can dehydrate your body very quickly. You can help yourself during this time by following these recommendations:

**Fluid intake** - It is important to replace lost body fluids. Try to drink or sip two to three quarts of water and other liquids daily. Include beverages high in potassium such as Gatorade; orange juice; weak, tepid tea; apple, cranberry or grape juice; bouillon; and gelatin.

**Food** - Eat a non fibrous, bland diet. Include noodles, custard, cottage cheese, white rice, white toast, and mild cooked vegetables, soy or almond milk. Eat small meals frequently instead of two or three large meals. If diarrhea is severe, consume only liquids. Avoid milk and milk products or, if necessary, use lactose free milk. Do not eat whole grains, raw fruits or vegetables. Avoid any rich, fatty or spicy foods.

**Monitor** - You should be prepared to report to your provider or nurse the amount, frequency and character of stools.

**Rectal care** - Soak in a tub to promote comfort. Cleanse the area gently after each bowel movement with mild soap and water, rinse well and pat dry.

If severe diarrhea persists beyond 24 hours or if it is accompanied by severe and prolonged cramping, blood or fever, contact your provider immediately.

## What is chemo brain?

Here are just a few examples of what patients call chemo brain:

- forgetting things that they usually have no trouble recalling-- memory lapses
- trouble concentrating--they can't focus on the task at hand
- trouble remembering details like names, dates, and sometimes larger events
- trouble multi-tasking, like answering the phone while cooking, without losing track of one of them-- less ability to do more than one thing at a time
- taking longer to finish things --slower thinking and processing
- trouble remembering common words--can't finish a sentence because you can't find the right words

## Day-to-day coping

Experts have been studying memory for a long time and there are many resources to help you sharpen your mental abilities and manage the problems that may come with chemo brain. Some things that you can do include the following:

Use a detailed daily planner. Keeping everything in one place makes it easier to find the reminders you may need. Serious planner users keep track of their appointments and schedules, "to do" lists, important birthdays and anniversaries, phone numbers and addresses, meeting notes, and even movies they'd like to see or books they'd like to read.

Exercise your brain. Take a class, do word puzzles, or learn a new language.

Get enough rest and sleep.

Exercise your body. Regular physical activity is not only good for your body but also improves your mood, makes you feel more alert, and decreases fatigue.

Eat your veggies. Studies have shown that eating more vegetables can help you maintain brain power.

Set up and follow routines. Pick a certain place for commonly lost objects and put them there each time. Try to keep the same daily schedule.

Don't try to multi-task. Focus on one thing at a time.

Keep a diary of when you notice problems and the events that are going on at the time. Medicines taken, time of day, and the situation you are in may help you figure out what affects your memory. Keeping track of when the problems are most noticeable can also help you prepare by not planning important conversations or appointments during those times.

Try not to focus so much on how much these symptoms are bothering you. As many patients have noted, being able to laugh about things you can't control can help you cope. Sometimes we all have to laugh about forgetting to take the carefully composed grocery list with us to the store.

## Telling Others

Tell family, friends, and your healthcare team about it. Even though this is not a change that is easy to see, like hair loss or skin changes, your family and friends may have noticed some things and may even have some helpful suggestions. For example, your partner may notice that when you are rushed, you have more trouble finding things. Getting support and understanding can help you relax and make it easier for you to focus and process information.

## Dry Skin and Itching

Rough, red, flaky and sometimes painful skin caused by inadequate oil and water in the layers of the skin can be a side effect of chemotherapy or radiation therapy. Prevention is the best policy. Use good quality lotion or cream as needed to all areas of your skin that seem dry to you.

If you have dry skin, avoid bathing in hot water. Use warm water instead and do not take more than one tub bath or shower a day, unless necessary. Add mineral or baby oil to the bath water, and apply water-based creams two or three times a day, especially after bathing. Drink 8-12 glasses of liquid a day and protect your skin from the cold and wind.

Some newer chemotherapy drugs can cause a rash. If the skin gets very rough, red or painful, or if a skin rash develops, contact your provider.

Chemotherapy and radiation therapy rarely triggers itching, which may result in restlessness, anxiety, skin sores and infection. If this does occur, apply skin creams with a water-soluble base, such as aloe vera lotion, two or three times a day, especially after a bath when the skin is damp. Use warm water for bathing instead of hot, and add baking soda or bath oil. Wash skin gently using a mild soap, and use baking soda instead of deodorant. Do not use scented products or products containing alcohol on the skin.

Instead of scratching, try gentle rubbing, pressure or vibration using a soft cloth. Keep your fingernails clean and cut short to avoid scratches and possible infection. Wear loose clothing made of soft fabric, change bed sheets daily, and keep room temperatures relatively cool (60 to 70 degrees) and well ventilated. Get adequate rest and drink plenty of water and other fluids, avoiding alcohol and coffee.

You should call your provider if the itching does not subside after two days, if the skin takes on a yellowish color or urine turns the color of tea, if the rash becomes worse after applying creams or ointments, or if pus pockets develop. Seek help if you develop hives or begin bleeding.

## Hair Loss

Some, not all, chemotherapy drugs cause hair loss. Hair loss occurs because the chemotherapy drugs circulating through the body can damage hair follicles, causing hair to fall out. Even with the same drugs, the effects vary. Some people experience hair loss and others do not. Some drugs affect only head hair, while other drugs may cause hair loss elsewhere on the body.

Radiation therapy to the head also can lead to scalp hair loss. Depending on the dose of radiation to the head, hair may not regrow naturally.

It's normal to worry about hair loss. One way to deal with it is to buy a wig or toupee. You may wish to do this before your treatment begins, which will allow the wig shop to match your hair color and texture before hair loss occurs. Today's wigs are very good and cannot be distinguished from your own hair. In fact, many women with long hair have their hair styled very short and have a wig made from their own cut hair. A wig may be covered by your insurance so be sure to get a provider's prescription.

Hair loss can be reduced somewhat by avoiding excessive brushing or pulling of hair, and by avoiding heat-generating styling appliances such as hair dryers, electric rollers and curling irons. If hair loss does occur, it will usually begin within two weeks after starting therapy and progresses one to two months later. Hair will often begin to regrow even before therapy is completed.

## Preventing Infections

Chemotherapy and radiation therapy can temporarily reduce your infection-fighting white blood cells. By practicing basic preventative measures, you can contribute to your wellness and lower the risk of infection. Suggestions that will help prevent infections:

Conserve energy.

Listen to your body! Plan for periods of rest and sleep.

Eat well and include nutritious foods in your diet.

Be alert to potential sources of infection.

Unless advised otherwise by your provider, feel free to go out in public. However, you should avoid people with bacterial infections, colds, sore throats, the flu, chicken pox, measles and cold sores. Try not to mingle with large crowds.

Don't handle bird, cat or dog feces. Avoid cleaning bird cages or changing kitty litter.

Avoid gardening or contact with potted soil and fresh floral arrangements.

Keep your body clean. Bathe daily.

Wash your hands before preparing food or eating and after using the bathroom. Keep nails clean, clipped straight across and short.

Take care of your mouth daily. Use a soft bristle toothbrush.

Keep lips moist with Vaseline.

Clean yourself carefully after bowel movements. Always wipe from front to back.

Deep breathe every hour while awake. Try to schedule mild exercise every day.

Drink six to eight glasses of water a day.

Be alert to signs and symptoms of infection. Report these symptoms to your provider or nurse immediately:

Fever of 100.5 degrees or greater or a shaking chill.

Painful or frequent urination.

A cough or sore throat, chest pain, shortness of breath

Skin changes, pain at needle site, swelling or redness, infected-looking areas.

Diarrhea or loose bowels more than four times a day.

Headache or stiff neck.

## Sexuality and Intimacy

With its warmth, emotional intimacy and caring, sexuality is an essential, life-affirming part of our human nature. It's more than just the act of intercourse; it involves simple gestures of affection such as holding hands, hugging, kissing, and special looks between people who love one another. Cancer does not change our need for intimacy.

But some forms of cancer treatment can affect physical sexuality to varying degrees. Sexual desire may decrease due to fears about diagnosis and treatment. Chemotherapy can leave you very tired or feeling sick. Radiation therapy to the genital area sometimes causes pain during intercourse. Your provider and nurse can help you with specific information about possible effects and what you may be able to do to alleviate them.

You may:

- Feel tired and not strong enough to be sexually active.

- Be nauseous and not in the mood.

- Be anxious about the way your diagnosis may change your life, how well your treatment is going, how your family is coping with your illness or how a loss of income or medical bills could affect your future.

All of these things cause stress. When you are under stress, sex may be the last thing on your mind. Remember that these changes usually don't last long. There is no medical reason to stop having sex during chemotherapy. The drugs will not have any long-term effects on your sexual performance or enjoyment of sex. Chemotherapy will not affect your partner. However, it is important to use a contraceptive to prevent pregnancy while receiving chemotherapy.

Do not be afraid to talk openly with your partner about what is happening. Make sure you both know that having cancer does not mean you are somehow contaminated. You cannot give your partner cancer, nor can you pass radiation or chemotherapy on to him or her. Understand, too, that there are many ways to express affection and intimacy beyond intercourse. And when you feel desire for sexual interaction and you feel able, don't ignore it. Tell your partner and enjoy being with him or her.

## Spirituality

Spirituality is an important and self-healing resource that we can all tap into on our life journey. We as human beings are creatures with a complex, multi-dimensional nature that includes a physical, emotional, and spiritual component. It is necessary to look at and care for each of these parts of ourselves because all three parts are linked together and overlapping, affecting the others in varying degrees.

For many, a diagnosis of cancer is the first dramatic realization of the impending mortality we will all face at some point. It can also be an opportunity to explore and develop a most therapeutic tool, our spirituality. Spirituality has been described as a "central vitality," a nonphysical force that gives meaning and integrity to life. It is felt as a deep feeling of well-being, of joy and satisfaction. Spirituality can be expressed in religious beliefs, or anything that provides transcendent meaning to our lives.

We can foster spiritual practices in our everyday lives by reading inspirational books, writings, or poetry and listening to music. Spend time out-of-doors at a favorite spot. Reflect on joyful memories, look at family pictures and recall stories that are precious to you. Find ways to help and support others. If you enjoyed religious practices in the past, see if they are helpful to you now. Attend church or worship services. Meditate, contemplate, and pray if that provides serenity to you. Call your pastor or spiritual leader. Contact old friends who hold a special place in your life. Hold or hug someone who loves you and whom you love. All of these things are life-affirming and enhance our spiritual nature.

There can be roadblocks to spiritual development. They include estrangement from others, blame, guilt, shame, hatred, and inability to forgive. Sometimes we need to take care of discussions regarding care for children or spouses, sorting out personal possessions, expenses, a living will, etc. Set yourself free to care for your spirit by taking care of the business things that you need to, attempt to let go of any negative emotions. Forge a commitment to make the most of your time. Be gentle with yourself about reaching your goals.

### **Consider Counseling**

In choosing a counselor it's important to find someone you feel comfortable with who has the training and credentials to help you. Look for counselors who have completed recognized training courses, who work under a Code of Practice, have professional clinical supervision, and complete continuing education courses. Your provider or nurse may be able to refer you to a support group or counselor.

Seeing a counselor is not a sign of weakness. It doesn't mean that you can't cope or that you're "going crazy." The emotional pressures of living with cancer can be immense and it's natural to feel overwhelmed. Seeing a counselor gives you a chance to talk about what it really means to have cancer and live with the diagnosis.

A Method for Effective Coping

Confront each problem directly.

Look at the situation as a problem to be solved.

Insist on complete information.

Expect positive change.

Be flexible; take things as they come.

Divide major decisions into smaller parts.

Look for resources to help you.

Write down your 'plan of action'.

Seek support.



**\*MEMORIAL**

*Comprehensive  
Cancer Care*