

Foods that Soothe

By Danielle Taylor

Cancer Drugs Can Take Their Toll. The Right Foods Can Make Your Treatment a Little Easier to Swallow.

Sometimes the side effects from cancer treatments can seem worse than the disease itself. With nausea, hair loss, pain and constant fatigue among the more common complaints, it can be difficult to keep taking your medicine day after day—even though you know it’s critical in your fight against cancer. Although there are more drugs available that can help combat your discomfort, most cancer patients would agree that the fewer medications they have to tolerate the better.

Fortunately, a well-thought-out nutritional plan offers some natural, healthy options that can help diminish your distress. While a conscientious diet won’t eliminate all of your side effects, in general you can improve your outcome by eating lots of protein to keep your body building strong cells and by drinking plenty of water (at least 64 ounces a day) to help soothe radiation-burned skin and flush toxic chemicals through your system. There are also remedies for more specific symptoms.

Nausea and Vomiting

One of chemotherapy’s most commonly reported side effects, nausea can persist through the course of your treatments and can make the thought of eating unbearable. If vomiting occurs, dehydration can quickly follow, so it’s important to drink as many clear, uncaffeinated liquids as possible. Ginger has been a helpful anti-nausea remedy for thousands of years,

so flat ginger ale made with real ginger (such as Canada Dry or Vernors) or ginger tea might help ease your symptoms.

Dry or very bland, low-odor foods may go down easier than the alternatives, and many are packed with carbs that will help restore the energy sapped by nausea and vomiting. Try toast, crackers, oatmeal, brown rice, bananas and applesauce. If you can tolerate a bit more taste, frozen popsicles, sorbet, sherbet and yogurt can help replenish lost vitamins and

introduce you to a regular diet. The loss of electrolytes (elements such as sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium) is also a major risk of vomiting, so restore your previous balance with bananas, potatoes, milk and soy products.

Fatigue

Lethargy can become common for many people undergoing cancer treatments. The best way to get a quick energy boost and maintain your stamina is by combin-



Quinoa is rich in protein and can be mixed into many recipes.

ing simple and complex carbohydrates with fiber. Simple carbs, such as sugar, provide a quick hit of energy but can cause your alertness level to plummet below its original level if those simple carbs are not backed up by slower-burning complex carbs.

Fiber causes carbohydrates to absorb more slowly in the body, so whole-grain foods such as brown rice, oatmeal and popcorn and whole-grain varieties of bread, cereal and pasta pack a double punch. Starchy vegetables like pumpkin, squash, potatoes and carrots also fall into the complex-carb category, so including cooked versions of these in your diet will also help keep you perky for longer. Switching to four to six smaller meals each day will help you keep you going, and it will also give you the chance to squeeze more calories and nutrients in.

And whatever you do, don't skip breakfast. This oft-ignored meal can start your day right, so don't miss out on the opportunity. For an energy-packed breakfast, try cooked quinoa (a whole grain

packed with protein) mixed with honey, milk and berries.

Taste Changes and Digestion

In one of cancer's bitter ironies, you may pass the nausea hurdle only to find that your favorite foods have lost their taste or you can't digest things with the same ease as before.

Many doctors recommend avoiding raw fruits and vegetables entirely through the course of your cancer treatments, as they can be difficult to digest and may carry bacteria or chemicals. Simply cook your favorites and find new recipes to mesh the foods you like with your new dietary restrictions.

Fiber greatly affects digestion, and it is plentiful in whole-grain foods, fruits and berries, dark green leafy vegetables and beans. If you suffer from diarrhea, reduce your intake of these high-fiber foods as well as dairy products, high-fat foods and caffeine. In many cases, simply removing the skin of an offending fruit or vegetable may help ease your symptoms. With con-

stipation, increasing your consumption of these foods may offer relief, but in combination with some medications, they can actually make your symptoms worse. Consult your physician for advice regarding your symptoms.

If foods, especially meats, begin to take on a bitter, metallic taste, get your protein instead from poultry, dairy, nuts, eggs, beans, seafood and soy. Plastic utensils versus metal ones may diminish the tinny taste, as can tart foods such as sauerkraut, pickles and processed citrus and cranberry products. Adding herbs, spices and sauces may likewise make any food more palatable.

Cancer and its treatments affect different people in different ways, and it's likely that some of your body's responses will change throughout the course of your treatment. Try a variety of different foods, and don't be hesitant to sample something again even if it hasn't worked for you before. With a little trial and error, you can likely find some remedies that will help you through your treatments. ■ TBC



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