

HOW BAD WILL TREATMENT MAKE ME FEEL?



Everyone reacts differently – some struggle with side-effects, while others sail through. Your care team are here to help, and short-term side-effects will gradually disappear once your treatment's finished.

Losing your hair

Your hair can form a big part of your identity. It's absolutely normal during chemo to be more worried about losing your hair than the cancer itself – don't feel bad if you can relate. Here are some tips:

- Some people prefer to shave their head before treatment starts, so it's on their terms
- Take a sample of your hair so you can match a wig to it, if you want to keep looking like you
- Try new makeup if you lose your brows and lashes – YouTube inspo or makeup counter staff can help
- Ask your team about free NHS wigs. In Wales or Northern Ireland, wigs are free for everyone
- Ask your team about a scalp cooling cap during chemo, which can slow down hair loss.

Tiredness, fatigue and difficulty sleeping

Treatment can be intense and it's common to feel really tired. It should ease up when your treatment is finished, but you've been through a lot. It's normal to feel it for a while afterwards. Fatigue is a bit different. It's an overwhelming tiredness that can make you feel like you can't do anything.

- Be kind to yourself – pace yourself and try to focus on doing what makes you happy and energised
- Keep track of when you feel fatigued in a diary and show it to your doctor or nurse
- If you're on steroids, taking tablets first thing in the morning can help you sleep better
- Exercise can help! A physio can put together an exercise programme that's right for you.

Lack of concentration

'Chemo brain' is when you feel foggy or find it hard to focus on anything for very long.

- Avoid overwhelming yourself by planning too far ahead, instead try to take each day as it comes
- Use planners, calendars, post-it notes, to-do lists and reminders on your phone
- Keep notes of important chats, such as talking to your doctor, or ask someone else to
- Talk to your doctor – they might have some things they can do to help.

Changes in appetite

Treatment can do weird things to your taste buds or make you feel hungry at odd times.

It's important to try and maintain your weight and to drink plenty of fluids during your treatment.

- The hospital dietitian can help you get the nutrition and calories you need, in a way that's still satisfying and do-able on treatment
- Increased appetite and weight gain can happen on steroids. Your appetite will go back to normal once you stop taking them, but some people need support losing extra weight.

Feeling sick

Chemo is known for making people feel nauseous and can occasionally cause vomiting (being sick).

- Take any anti-sickness medicines as prescribed – it's harder to control nausea once their levels drop
- Go for cold or slightly warm food if the smell of cooked or cooking food makes you feel sick
- Try ginger or peppermint teas, suck on mints or an ice cube, eat a ginger biscuit or sip ginger ale
- If some smells trigger your nausea, try sniffing an essential oil like tea tree or menthol to mask them.

Tummy troubles

Oh, the joy. Chemo drugs may affect how your bowel works, leading to constipation or diarrhoea.

- Laxatives or anti-diarrhoea drugs can help. It might feel embarrassing to tell your team, but to them it's no big deal – there's almost nothing they haven't heard before.

Mouth ulcers and sores

A sore mouth can be miserable on chemo. It should disappear after you finish treatment, but in the meantime, look after your oral health. Some hospitals offer low-level laser therapy for mouth ulcers.

- Clean your teeth regularly but gently and have frequent dental check-ups
- Keep hydrated by sipping water throughout the day
- Opt for soft foods, avoid acidic, spicy or crunchy items, and steer clear of cigarettes and alcohol.

Skin problems

Cancer treatments can leave your skin more sensitive and sore than usual. If you're having external radiotherapy, you may develop a skin reaction, like sunburn, starting about 10 days after treatment.

- Tell your specialist about soreness, itchiness or colour changes, especially if you have acne or eczema
- Your radiotherapy team can advise on skincare. If on chemo, protect your skin from strong sunlight.

Changes in mood

You may feel more anxious or emotional while you're taking steroids, and still tired and low for a while after you stop taking them.

- Keep an eye on how you're feeling, and try opening up to a friend or counsellor if you can
- If you feel like you're struggling to cope or you're constantly down, tell your consultant. Whether it's the steroids or everything you're going through, there is help out there for you.

Fertility

Some treatments may affect your ability to have children. We know it's a lot to think about right now.

- You may be able to store eggs or sperm before or even during treatment, to use later in life
- Talk to your specialist. They can help protect your options before treatment starts.

Contact us for support, Monday to Friday:

Phone: 0300 303 5220 (9am–5pm)

Email: getsupport@younglivesvs cancer.org.uk (9am–5pm)

Live chat at [younglivesvs cancer.org.uk](https://www.younglivesvs cancer.org.uk) (10am–4pm)



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on managing side-effects**

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