


## **Fear of Treatment-Related Side Effects** [1]

 *Listen to the Cancer.Net Podcast: Coping With the Fear of Side Effects*[2], adapted from this feature.

As you prepare to start cancer treatment, it is normal to fear the unexpected and worry that treatment will be difficult. In fact, fearing treatment-related side effects [3] is common after a diagnosis of cancer. However, it may help to know that preventing and controlling side effects is an important priority for your health care team. Don't be afraid to talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist to learn the facts about your situation, including which side effects you may or may not experience and what options you have for managing them. A little information can go a long way toward easing your mind and helping you prepare for what lies ahead.

### **Common fears**

Some of the most common fears about side effects include:

- Losing control and/or not knowing what to expect
- Experiencing discomfort, pain, nausea, or fatigue
- Losing the ability to do regular, daily activities, such as going to work, completing household tasks, and attending social events
- Experiencing changes in appearance, such as hair loss or scars
- Developing sexual problems or experiencing fertility issues (problems becoming pregnant or having children) after treatment
- Feeling generally anxious about a treatment or a procedure (such as surgery or an MRI test)

### **Coping with your fears**

The following suggestions can help you cope with the fear of treatment-related side effects:

- Remember that the long-term goal of treatment is to help you, not hurt you.
- Know that many cancer treatments used today are less intense and less prolonged than previous treatments.
- If you do experience side effects, there are many medications that can help you manage them. Also, most side effects go away once treatment ends.
- Ask questions and seek the support of your health care team, including your doctor, nurse [4],

pharmacist, and [social worker](#) [5]. Your doctor or nurse can tell you what side effects are common for each treatment and help you manage them. Often, many side effects can be anticipated and/or prevented before treatment starts. In addition, a social worker can provide counseling and referrals to community resources where you can find support.

- Ask for information about how to reach the doctor's office after hours and for a list of symptoms that may require immediate care.
- Stay involved in your care and express your thoughts in the treatment decision-making process. This will give you a sense of control and help you feel less anxious.
- Learn about [fertility preservation options](#) [6] and ask your doctor about seeing a fertility specialist before treatment begins. Being proactive and learning about your options will help address any concerns you may have about starting or expanding your family once treatment is over.
- Talk with your family and loved ones about your expectations and concerns. The help and support of family and friends can reduce any worry you may have about not being able to keep up with your responsibilities if you experience side effects from treatment.
- Find [others who have recently gone through the same treatments](#) [7] so you know what to expect. You may find [support groups](#) [8] in your local community or [online](#) [9]. It can help to talk with others and know that you are not alone. However, it is also important to remember that each person's experiences with side effects may be different from your own.
- Talk with your employer so that he or she knows what you will be going through. Your employer may be willing to make some adjustments in your schedule while you undergo treatment. Learn more about [cancer and the workplace](#) [10].
- Stay focused on the present; dwelling on things that may or may not happen will only intensify negative feelings.
- Keep a journal, which can help you express your feelings and document your journey. Learn more about [finding comfort through journaling](#) [11].
- Try relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, music therapy, yoga, and meditation, which can help reduce anxiety. When you are less anxious, you can focus better and make more educated decisions.
- Give yourself time to grieve physical losses and to adjust to your new body, regardless of whether changes in your physical appearance are temporary or permanent.

## More Information

[Coping: Emotional and Physical Matters](#) [12]

[Support and Resources](#) [13]

[When to Call the Doctor During Cancer Treatment](#) [14]

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### Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-and-emotions/managing-emotions/fear-treatment-related-side-effects>

[2] [http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/Coping\\_With\\_Fear\\_of\\_Side\\_Effects.mp3](http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/Coping_With_Fear_of_Side_Effects.mp3)

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25238>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24396>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24556>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25660>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24526>

- [8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25383>
- [9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24634>
- [10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24549>
- [11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24528>
- [12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25109>
- [13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25325>
- [14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/26366>