

*If you have
any questions
or concerns,
please talk with
your physician
or nurse.*

Anemia During Cancer Treatment

Anemia is a condition in which your blood does not have enough healthy red blood cells (RBCs). The RBCs in your blood carry oxygen from your lungs to every part of your body. When there are too few RBCs, your muscles and organs cannot work properly. Anemia is a common side effect of cancer treatment.

Chemotherapy side effects

Chemotherapy works by destroying cancer cells. It may also damage healthy cells, RBCs and bone marrow which makes RBCs.

Other side effects of chemotherapy that can also affect your body's ability to make RBCs include a decreased appetite, nausea and vomiting.

Most of the time, anemia goes away once cancer treatment is stopped.

Symptoms of anemia

Anemia can lead to low oxygen levels in your body. You may have these symptoms:

- Feeling weak and tired
- Fast or irregular heartbeat
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Headaches or dizziness
- Cold hands or feet
- Difficulty concentrating
- Pale or yellow-colored skin

Treating and managing anemia

Your physician or nurse will test your blood often during treatment to check for anemia. If your RBCs are low, your physician may offer different treatment options, such as giving you fluids or dietary supplements.

Be sure to have all lab tests done as ordered by your physician. If your blood count goes too low, your physician may order a blood transfusion.

You can manage your anemia and care for your body by following these tips:

- Eat a well-balanced diet and stay hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids.
- Exercise regularly as you are able. Take short walks whenever you can.
- Get plenty of rest. Take naps during the day if you can.
- When sitting or lying down, get up slowly to prevent dizziness.
- Practice good dental hygiene. Visit the dentist routinely.
- Wash your hands often to avoid infection.

Call your physician right away if you have a temperature that is higher than normal for you.

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department if you have these symptoms:

- Chest pain
- Trouble breathing when at rest