

## **Chemo Relief: Tips *for Patients from Patients***

1. Sleep when you are dragging. Your body needs it.
2. Don't push and keep going when you are exhausted, but try to take short walks when you can. Keep your metabolism going and processing the chemo through.
3. A gargle of cold water, a smidge of baking soda, and a shake of salt gets rid of the metallic taste and helps ward off mouth sores. Do it 3 or 4 times a day.
4. Brush your teeth more often. Film, plaque, coating, nasty-mouth all builds up from chemo.
5. Start nausea meds when directed. Don't wait until you feel sick—that's too late.
6. Go to the American Cancer Society's "Look Good, Feel Better" program when offered. It's free, gives you lots of practical advice, gets you out among chemo friends to get advice, and you come home with a booty of makeup! Call the Women's Health Resource Center (On the Mall in Lebanon—650-2600). It's nice to get treated for all we are going through!
7. Get "Tears" eye drops for moisture. Chemo dries out your eyes. Sometimes your eyes water like crazy, but that's the tear ducts overcompensating for the moisture that's supposed to be there.
8. Fingernails start to grow in ridgy and white-striped. No biggy. Just a heads up. You won't see this until near the end of treatment. It'll clear.
9. A port may be a pretty good idea. Your arms can get black and blue and veins swollen from all the poking.
10. Breathe deeply and steady when nausea comes on.
11. When going through chemo, choose foods that both your brain and your stomach say "yes" to. (I lived on chocolate shakes, tapioca and watermelon that first week after.) Drink nutra-shakes with vitamins—you've seen those TV ads. That way you'll get what you need during the "slim" times.
12. You can go from diarrhea to constipation. For constipation, over-the-counter medications and Smooth Move Tea (found in health food stores) works well. For diarrhea, over the counter remedies can help too.
13. Good for you for cutting your hair short before it starts falling out! You'll have it a little longer now, and you'll start to notice more hairs in your brush and

down the drain. It'll get thinner and closer to your head. One day you'll say, "It's getting cut." It'll be a shocker to look in the mirror. You WILL get used to it. Get some fuzzy night caps to sleep in for cooler weather and all. Get a supply of hats and scarves or a wig, whatever feels right for you. All hair goes: legs, under arms, pubic, eyebrows thin. If you want, use an eyebrow pencil.

14. Watch your temperature during that first 10 days after treatment. A temp of 100.5 degrees is the marker for calling the hospital, because infection can spread quickly. Try best to stay out of crowds to avoid germs. Wash hands constantly. Drink lots of water, liquids.
15. Don't read too much cancer material. It gets overwhelming and depressing. Read what you need to get information, and then pick up fun books and magazines, go for a walk, have a friend over who makes you laugh.
16. Do things that make you happy. Take lots of walks, even small ones, just to get out. Use lots of sunscreen when outside. Your skin is really sensitive with chemo.
17. Buy a nice nightgown or bathrobe—something that makes you feel really feminine. It's hard to feel feminine when you're sick and bald and recently scarred and with drains hanging off you.
18. Accept offers of help: casseroles, drives to the hospital, someone to take the kids, etc. Folks WANT to be of help. Give them practical ideas when someone asks, "What can I do for you?" You'll be able to return the favor later.
19. Don't hold your tongue. Bark at the insensitive folks who bug you. Speak up when someone says something utterly stupid about you having cancer. This is YOUR time. Draw the curtains, lock the doors and get your nap in. Do what you need for you. Expect some crabbiness.
20. Hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign on your doorbell when sleeping. (We had neighborhood kids who came around to play. I had to control their knocking and ringing to get some rest. Then I had to call some moms when the kids didn't "get it.")
21. Don't change the kitty litter if you have a cat, and always wear gloves when gardening. Avoid germs, infection.
22. Keep needed numbers handy: nurse's station, doctor, social workers, drug store, babysitters, etc.

Call someone whenever you have questions or want to talk. You *will* get through this. Just pace yourself and take all the help that's offered.