

# Diet and exercise during chemotherapy

An Educational Resource for Patients With Triple-Negative Disease

It's often said, but it is important to remember that **YOU are a key member of your own treatment team.** Two areas where you can really contribute to your own care and well-being, especially during chemotherapy, are diet and exercise.



## Diet

Your cancer care team may include someone to go over your nutritional status and dietary needs before, during, and after chemotherapy. This person may be a nutritionist, a registered dietitian, or another professional with the right training. He or she will help make sure that your daily diet gives

you the nutrition you need to stay healthy. A good nutritional counselor can also help you manage some of the more common side effects of chemotherapy by carefully changing your diet. It is important to remember, however, that a healthy diet during chemotherapy or after a diagnosis of breast cancer is really the same healthy diet that everyone else should be eating.

**Anemia**, for example, can be treated with blood transfusions or drugs that help make more red blood cells, but this can be helped if you make sure you get enough iron and vitamin B12 with your diet or with supplements.

**Diarrhea**, when bad, may require medical attention, but mild diarrhea may be managed by drinking more clear liquids; eating smaller and more frequent meals; getting more sodium and potassium; changing the way you prepare your food (for example,

cooking fruits and vegetables instead of eating them raw); and avoiding high-fat, fried, or greasy foods. The BRAT diet (**B**ananas, **R**ice, **A**pplesauce, and **T**oast) can be helpful here.

**Nausea** might be reduced by eating smaller, more frequent meals; eating dry foods like crackers, toast, and cereal; and avoiding greasy foods. Ginger is a well-known natural therapy for nausea, so consuming more ginger ale and ginger tea or snacking on crystallized ginger may help.



**Infection** can be a concern because chemotherapy can suppress white blood cells, and these cells are your star infection fighters. Most patients who are receiving chemotherapy for breast cancer have

enough white cells, but sometimes they can fall low enough to increase your risk of infection. You can help lower your risk of infection by thoroughly washing fruits and vegetables and cooking all foods (meats, fruits, vegetables, and grains) before eating them. Avoid raw foods (such as sushi and uncooked oysters), and do not consume

foods or drinks that are past their expiration dates.

These are a few simple examples to show you that diet is an important part of cancer care—not just to maintain good nutrition, but also to manage common chemotherapy side effects. If your cancer team does not have a nutrition expert, you may be able to ask your doctor for a referral to one.



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## Exercise

It seems like it should be common sense that regular exercise would be good for patients with cancer—the same way it is for everybody—in terms of heart health and weight control. But a 2007 study out of Canada showed that breast cancer patients who do aerobic exercise (that is, the kind that makes your heart rate go up) or resistance exercise (the kind that builds muscles) for the length of their chemotherapy cycle may see even more benefits beyond these basic ones.

After only 3 to 4 weeks in the study, women who did



aerobic exercise during their chemotherapy cycle had better self-esteem, better aerobic fitness, and a lower percentage of body fat than women who did not exercise. Women who did resistance exercise had better self-esteem, better muscle strength, more lean body mass, and better rates of completing their chemotherapy regimen than women who did not exercise, and these benefits appeared to persist even months after chemotherapy. This means that—if you are able—there may be some benefit to trying to keep an active lifestyle during your chemotherapy.

*Be sure to talk to your treatment team about how you can make changes to your diet and exercise plan so you can be in great mental and physical condition while taking chemotherapy.*

## DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS RELATED TO OTHER COMMON ASPECTS OF TRIPLE-NEGATIVE BREAST CANCER?

Additional **free** patient education fact sheets are available on the following topics:

- Chemotherapy side effects
- Myths/misconceptions about triple-negative disease
- Wig selection and care
- Treatment options

Ask your doctor about these additional resources today!

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