

Maximizing nutrition during cancer care

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The physical and emotional tolls chemotherapy can have on a patient undergoing cancer treatment are well known, but there are many myths when it comes to managing fitness and nutrition during treatment.

"I think one of the biggest misconceptions surrounding chemotherapy is that [patients](#) will lose [weight](#)," said Rachel Dudley, nutritionist in the Dan L Duncan Comprehensive Cancer Center at Baylor College of Medicine. "While it is true that some people, such as head and neck [cancer](#) patients, will lose weight, treatment for many other cancer types, including breast cancer, are actually more likely to cause weight gain."

The first steps Dudley considers when creating a nutrition plan for a patient are their current nutrient intake and any potential treatment side effects.

"If we notice a patient is gaining weight on [treatment](#), I'll develop a plan centered on fresh fruits and vegetables, lean protein, healthy fats and whole grains. If significant weight loss becomes an issue, we will incorporate calorie-rich, nutrient-dense foods, such as fats and protein," Dudley said.

Dudley also advises her clients to treat [food](#) like medication and set reminders so you know your body is getting what it needs, and adopt a regular exercise routine to maintain strength.

Some variations of chemotherapy can impact the way certain foods taste or cause mouth sores that are sensitive to spicy or acidic foods.

"Many patients say that a certain food that they typically enjoy tastes completely different," explained Dudley. "This happens frequently with [chemotherapy](#), and it may take some trial and error to find out what you enjoy eating. To help ease mouth sores, I usually provide patients with the recipe for a simple mouthwash made from common household ingredients."

Additionally, some patients may experience sensitivity to cold food or drinks following infusion sessions, but Dudley says this typically lasts for a short time and will subside.

"When someone is diagnosed with cancer, it is common for their family and close friends to rally around them in support, oftentimes making meals or helping in other ways," added Dudley. "You want to be sure to gift food items that are high in nutritional value and easy to section into multiple meals, as fatigue is also common."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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