

MyChristie-MyHealth

Self help guide

This is a guide for people who have lung cancer and are currently having treatment or had treatment in the past. The guide gives advice on how to manage some of the common symptoms at home.

Please note that this information does not replace medical care. Seek medical advice if you feel unwell in any way or are concerned about your symptoms. Please contact The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658** or call 999 for life threatening emergencies. For more information please visit The Christie or Macmillan website.

Pain

There are many things you can do to make your pain easier to cope with. Even small changes to your routine can make a difference.

- Try to make sure you're as comfortable as possible. Sit or lie in a position that doesn't cause pain. Changing position regularly, using special pillows and having equipment to help with moving can also help.
- You might want to try using heat or cold to relieve pain. Heat pads and warm baths can ease aches and stiffness, whilst an ice pack may relieve inflammation and swelling.
- Other things can help distract you from pain, such as watching TV, reading or listening to music. Having family or friends for short, regular visits can be something to look forward to. Some people also find that art or music therapy reduces feelings of anxiety and helps them to relax.
- Talking to family members or friends can often help to relieve worry or anxiety. Often, they can also help you find the information and support you need.
- Smoking may affect how you feel pain and how painkillers work. Quitting has lots of benefits and is one of the healthiest decisions you can make.

It's important to store your medicines properly and take them at the right times to ensure they work as well as possible. Here are some practical tips:

- Store painkillers safely – keep them in their labelled bottle or packet, in a cool, dry place, and out of children's reach.
- Check dates – check the label to make sure your drugs are not out of date. Remember to take your medicines – write a note, set an alarm or get someone to remind you. A schedule where you can mark off each dose may help.
- Use a pill organiser – these can help you keep track of medicines. You can label the box with the times you need to take them.
- When travelling with medicines – remember to take your medicines with you and make sure you have enough to cover the whole time away. Take a list of your medicines, copies of prescriptions and your doctor's telephone number in case these are needed.



Difficulty swallowing

With some types of illness or treatment you may experience a sore mouth or swallowing problems. This can be due to pain, inflammation, oral thrush or due to the position of the tumour. In this case you may find that foods that are 'easy to chew' are more comfortable and manageable. Sometimes the timing and co-ordination of the swallow may be affected. If you experience any of the following symptoms, then you may have a swallowing difficulty:

- Coughing on swallowing diet or fluids.
- Difficulty breathing after eating/drinking.
- Wet or gurgly voice after eating/drinking.
- Pocketing food in mouth.
- Unexplained chest infections.

You must inform a member of your medical team if you experience these, as you may require a referral to the speech and language therapists to assess the safety of your swallow. They will advise you on the safest texture of diet and fluids.

You may find that taking painkillers before meals can help you eat and drink more easily. Your doctor or nurse can suggest what might be best for you to take. Try foods that are moist and easier to chew and swallow. Add extra sauce or gravy to your meals. Some tips are:

- Slow cook, or casserole meat to make it tender.
- Cut the crusts off bread for softer sandwiches.
- Some frozen-meal home-delivery companies have a selection of foods that are easier to chew and swallow on their menu.
- There are several nutritional drinks that you may find helpful, for example Complan® drinks. You can buy these from your chemist or supermarket. Your doctor may give you a prescription for some of them. Your GP or dietitian can explain which food supplements might be best for you.

Shortness of breath

- Breathlessness can be a difficult symptom to live with, but there are ways you can manage it. There are different breathing techniques that you may find helpful. These include finding a sitting or standing position that is comfortable for you when you feel breathless.
- You may want to learn a technique called controlled breathing. This involves using your diaphragm and lower chest muscles to breathe instead of upper chest and shoulder muscles, which causes fast, shallow breathing. Controlled breathing can help you breathe more gently and effectively. Once you are in a comfortable position, try breathing in through your nose and out gently through your mouth. As you breathe out, try to relax your shoulders and upper chest muscles when you are feeling breathless.
- Another option is to use a small handheld fan to reduce your breathlessness. You can use it to blow cool air towards your nose and mouth. Sitting in front of an open window may also be helpful for you.

Breathlessness can affect your everyday activities. You may find it helpful to:

- prioritise things you most enjoy or that most need doing
- plan ahead
- pace yourself and take breaks
- sit down to wash, dress or prepare food

Cough

You may have an increase in your cough and sputum which may contain a small amount of blood. Don't worry, this is normal. Coughs can sometimes worsen when your treatment has finished. This is also normal. If you are worried about this please let the radiographers and your Christie doctor know.

Coughing up blood

A small amount of blood in the phlegm can sometimes be expected, and your doctor or your specialist lung nurse can advise you what to do. However, if your tumour is located close to blood vessels, there is a risk of coughing up fresh blood which rarely could be life threatening. If you are considered to be at higher risk of this side effect then your doctor will discuss this with you in more detail. If you are concerned you should ring The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658**.

Tiredness

- There are things you can do to help manage the symptoms of fatigue.
- Being physically active may improve your energy levels and increase your appetite. Start slowly and increase the amount of activity you do over time. Try setting yourself small goals that you can achieve, such as walking to the front door. Some exercise, even a small amount, is better than no exercise at all. It's important to get advice from your doctor before you do any new physical activity. They may refer you to a physiotherapist for further advice.
- Eating well and drinking lots of fluids can help increase your energy levels. Your doctor or nurse can give you advice on your diet.
- You may find that you feel more stressed when you are having treatment. This can make you feel more tired. Try to make time to relax. There are relaxation techniques you can use to relieve tension and increase your energy. Complementary therapies may also help you cope with fatigue and help you to relax. Speak to your GP about using these therapies.

Loss of appetite

During cancer treatment, you may lose your appetite. This may be because you feel sick or tired, or because food and drink taste different.

- Instead of three big meals a day, try eating small, frequent meals or snacks. If you find certain times of the day are better for you to eat, make the most of these times.
- Keep snacks handy to eat whenever you can. Bags of nuts or crisps, dried fruit or cheese and crackers are quite light and tasty. If these are hard for you to chew or swallow, try yogurt, peanut butter or fromage frais instead.
- Try to make your food look as attractive as possible. Put small portions on your plate and garnish the food with lemon, tomato or parsley. You could use a small plate to serve food on.
- You may want to try stimulating your appetite with a small beer, wine sherry or brandy half an hour before you eat. A glass of wine with meals may also help digestion. Check with your doctor that you can have alcohol.
- If you have recently had surgery or radiotherapy for bowel cancer, you may need advice about the best foods for you. Discuss this with a dietitian, your specialist nurse or doctor.
- Sweet or savoury nourishing drinks can be used alongside small meals. These can also be sipped slowly through the day.
- Eat your meals slowly, chew the food well and relax for a little while after each meal.
- Sometimes the smell of cooking can be appetising, but occasionally it can put you off eating. If you have family or friends who would like to help, ask them if they could cook for you. You can also try to eat cold foods that do not need cooking or ready made foods that can go straight in the oven.
- Everyone's appetite changes and you may have good and bad days. Make the most of the good days by eating well and treating yourself to your favourite foods.
- Try to eat your meals in a room where you feel relaxed and where there are no distractions.
- It may be possible to stimulate your appetite using medicines, such as a low dose of steroids or the hormone medroxyprogesterone. Your doctor may prescribe these for you.

Feeling or being sick (nausea or vomiting)

It's often easier to control and prevent nausea if you take anti-sickness drugs regularly, rather than treating the nausea after it has started. If feeling sick is putting you off your food, the following tips may help:

- Avoid eating or preparing food when you feel sick.
- Avoid fried foods, or foods with a strong smell.
- Preparing small meals and eating little and often can be helpful.
- Eat cold or warm food if the smell of hot food makes you feel sick.
- Eat little and often and chew your food well.
- Peppermints or peppermint tea may help some people.
- Sip drinks slowly.
- Ginger biscuits or ginger beer can help some people.
- Try not to drink a lot just before you eat.
- Relaxation - using relaxation tapes or taking part in activities that you find relaxing may help you cope with nausea.

Diarrhoea

- Drink plenty of liquid (at least 2 litres or 3.5 pints a day) to replace the fluid lost with the diarrhoea.
- Avoid drinking alcohol and coffee.
- Eat small, frequent meals made from light foods, for example white fish, poultry, well-cooked eggs, white bread, pasta or rice.
- Eat your meals slowly.
- Eat less fibre (for example cereals, raw fruits and vegetables) until the diarrhoea improves.
- Avoid greasy, fatty foods such as chips and beef burgers, and spicy foods like chilli peppers.

Antibiotics can kill off the healthy bacteria normally found in the bowel. This can cause diarrhoea. The bacteria found in live yogurt or yogurt drinks may replace the healthy bacteria so may help ease diarrhoea caused by antibiotics. But you should avoid live yogurt while you are having chemotherapy or if your immunity is low.

Constipation

- Make sure you eat plenty of fibre (roughage) each day. Good sources of fibre include:
 - whole-wheat breakfast cereals like Weetabix®, Shredded Wheat® or muesli
 - wholemeal bread and flour
 - brown rice
 - wholemeal pasta
 - fresh fruit and vegetables

Make sure you drink plenty of fluids – both hot and cold drinks will help. Aim to drink at least 2 litres (3.5 pints) a day. This is particularly important if you increase the amount of fibre in your diet, as eating fibre without drinking enough fluids can make constipation worse.

You could try a natural remedy for constipation. These include prune juice, prunes, fig syrup and dried apricots.

Gentle exercise, such as walking, will help keep your bowels moving.

If you are constipated because of the medicines you are taking, it may be possible to change the dose you take. You may need to take laxatives (medicines that help you poo) as well. Your doctor can give you more advice.

Peripheral neuropathy

Cancer and its treatment can sometimes damage nerves around the body. This is called peripheral neuropathy. Peripheral neuropathy can happen for a number of reasons:

- it can be a side effect of some anti-cancer drugs
- a tumour may be pressing on a nerve close by
- surgery or radiotherapy may sometimes damage nerves

If you drive you must let the DVLA know that you have peripheral neuropathy.

If your hands or feet are affected, it's important to protect them as much as possible:

- Keep them warm by wearing gloves and socks in cold weather.
- Wear gloves when working with your hands – for example, when gardening or washing up.
- Use potholders and take care to avoid burning your hands when cooking.
- Wear well-fitting shoes or boots.
- Avoid walking around barefoot and check your feet often for any problems.
- Test the temperature of water with your elbow to make sure it isn't too hot before baths, showers or doing the washing-up. Turn the temperature control (thermostat) to a lower setting for hot water, or have a temperature control fitted.

If your balance, coordination or walking are affected, you may be more at risk of accidents and falls:

- Make sure rooms are well lit and always put a light on if you get up during the night.
- Keep areas that you walk through (such as halls) free of clutter. Make sure there aren't things (such as loose rugs) that you could trip over.
- Get advice from a physiotherapist about walking aids if your balance is affected.

Changes to skin during cancer treatment

Cancer treatment may affect how your skin and nails look and feel.

To look after your skin, you can:

- Avoid soap and perfumed products.
- Gently cleanse your face, avoiding products containing alcohol.
- Use a moisturiser at least once a day.
- Use emollient creams to relieve itchy skin.
- For oily skin, use a wash-off cleanser followed by oil-free moisturiser.
- Use foundations, bronzers and green-tinted primers to control changes in skin tone.
- Protect yourself against the sun.
- Avoid scratching or wet-shaving your skin.

Your nails may become brittle, flaky, ridged or lined. Sometimes they may become painful or swollen.

To look after your nails, you can:

- Use nail-strengthening cream, hand cream and cuticle cream.
- Use an emery board instead of cutting your nails.
- Use nail varnish to hide discolouration but not if your nails are split.
- Wear gloves when doing chores.
- Wear comfortable shoes.
- Don't wear false nails.

Rashes or spots

If you develop a rash, always get it checked by your cancer nurse specialist or oncology team straightaway. They will know the cause and be able to give you some advice.

Further information

The Christie produces a range of patient information booklets and films that can be viewed on The Christie website. Booklets are free to patients coming to The Christie. If you would like a copy, please ask the ward staff. If you are an outpatient, please ask your nurse, doctor or radiographer.

Some of these are listed below:

- Radiotherapy to the lung
- Eating - help yourself
- Nutritional products
- Advice about soft and liquidised foods
- Be Active, Stay Active: A guide for exercising during and after treatment for cancer
- Complementary therapy and well-being

This information is based on content originally produced by Macmillan Cancer Support and is adapted with their permission.

For more information please visit The Christie or Macmillan website.

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact patient.information@christie.nhs.uk

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

