



Canadian Breast Cancer Network
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Breast Cancer
SIDE EFFECT
MANAGEMENT SERIES

6 ways to manage joint pain

Joint pain is often a side effect of breast cancer medications, especially tamoxifen and aromatase inhibitors, which people are often prescribed for years. If you happen to be someone who experiences this, you know that it can range from being mildly annoying to having a debilitating effect on your daily life. People often say they feel like they're 100 years old. There isn't one solution that will work for everyone, so it's helpful to explore a variety of options and find what works best for you.

Here are 6 different ways you can tackle joint pain:

1. Diet

For some people this may make no difference, but for others it can be life changing when it comes to managing inflammation and joint pain. For people looking for solutions without having to take additional medications, this may be an option worth exploring. Foods that contain sugar, trans fats and saturated fats, gluten, aspartame, MSG, refined carbohydrates, and omega 6 fatty acids may cause inflammation or be contributing to your joint pain. If food is a trigger for your pain, it usually is a matter of trial and error to figure out which ones are the culprits. Doing an elimination diet, may help you determine whether or not certain foods affect you. Some people have experienced tremendous success by making certain changes in their diet.

2. Exercise

[Studies](#) have shown that exercise can reduce joint pain that's specifically caused by aromatase inhibitors. Women who



participated in a year-long exercise program that combined strength training with aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, reported a 29% reduction in pain that interfered with their daily life. Being more active doesn't necessarily mean having to go to a gym every day, although if you love the gym then go for it. People who get their exercise through activities that they enjoy are more likely to stick with it. Maybe going for a brisk walk also allows you to enjoy nature, take some time to clear your head or reflect on the day. Perhaps doing yoga in your living room allows you to strengthen your body while calming your mind. Or you can catch up on your favorite show while working on strength training. Find out more about exercising safely after a breast cancer diagnosis [here](#).

3. Acupuncture

This complementary medical practice uses thin needles placed at various points on the body to help alleviate certain symptoms. [Studies](#) have shown that acupuncture can help with pain relief for joint pain. An added bonus is that you may find that this also helps with other side effects such as hot flashes. If you decide to try acupuncture it's important that the treatment is given by a qualified professional who uses single-use (disposable) needles.

4. Glucosamine and Chondroitin

[Studies](#) have shown that taking glucosamine and chondroitin can sometimes improve joint pain without having additional side effects. Glucosamine is naturally found in the fluid that surrounds your joints and chondroitin is in the cartilage around your joints. By taking these supplements you may increase the cushioning and lubrication of your joints which could reduce the pain you're feeling. Prior to taking any supplement, you should always speak to your health care team to ensure that you're taking the proper dose and that it's not going to interact in a negative way with anything else you're taking.

5. Medication

If you are open to taking additional medications your primary care physician may be able to prescribe something to help manage your joint pain. It's important to bring up all side effects you're having with your health care team so that they can provide with you with all your options and you can make an informed choice about what is best for you. Some women decide that they would rather try other options to manage their joint pain before they take additional medication because they've already taken a lot of medication to treat their cancer. Others are willing to try whatever will help manage their debilitating pain. It's a personal choice and only you can decide what's best for you.

6. Changing Treatments

Everyone reacts differently to medications and sometimes changing your treatment may lessen or resolve certain side effects. If you are unable to find a solution to managing your joint pain, ask your doctor whether there are other treatments you can try that are just as effective but may lessen your side effects. It can't hurt to ask.

What made a difference when managing my treatment side effects

By Carmela Bocale



I was not prepared for the number of decisions regarding treatment that needed to be made from cancer diagnosis to treatment options. It was both exhausting and overwhelming – how does one make sound life-changing decisions when there are so many options and choices? I learned to trust myself and be my own advocate as I navigated through the many decision points.

Fundamental to that was having an amazing support network, as I did (it's foundational), but at the end of the day you have to make the decision that is best for you and you have to do it for you – not for anyone else. My support network included the most loving partner, my mom, my sisters, my boys, my daughter-in-law, and my granddaughter, so many friends, and a remarkable employer who supported my time away from work financially through our sick leave plan and supported medications and treatments that were not covered in the provincial medical plan.

I realize I'm very fortunate and that not all women have these resources and supports in place. We need to do what we can, whether that is through education, advocacy, support networks, and financial and emotional support to ensure all women have treatment options that support their

overall well-being.

Though I won't be able to tell my full story, what I do want to share is how I become my own advocate to manage the many symptoms that came along with the treatment options and how I decided to manage those side-effects:

Resiliency: When navigating through a cancer diagnosis, there are so many things that are out of your control. I so desperately wanted to focus on what I could control, and what was essential was my choice to be resilient. Resiliency doesn't mean being a "Pollyanna" or not acknowledging your emotions. It is about having a number of strategies in place to navigate through this life-changing experience.

Education and Research: I researched various cancer-related sites and supports dedicated to education. I did a lot of reading and attending educational webinars (Inspire Health, CBCN, just to name a couple—there are lots of good ones) to determine the best way to manage symptoms and the many decisions I had to make.

Physiotherapy: I educated myself about the physical side effects of my mastectomy, which included tenderness, limited arm or shoulder movement, and numbness in my chest and upper arm – particularly where the lymph nodes were removed. What I discovered through my research is the necessary exercises to reduce these symptoms. Prior to surgery, I investigated physiotherapy options and had that in place so that I could transition to physiotherapy following the recovery from surgery. I was dedicated to my exercises and to my therapy sessions. I also explored what exercises to do to reduce lymphedema and am mindful of limitations. Today

I still have some numbness, which will probably never go away, but I have full-range arm movement, which is a result of being committed to my physiotherapy and exercises following my surgery.

Acupuncture: The hot flashes were fast and furious once I started chemotherapy. Because of the type of breast cancer I had, estrogen and progesterone receptor positive, there was nothing I could take to help, but what did help was acupuncture!! Initially I went twice a week for four weeks and now I'm on monthly maintenance. This was a life saver!

Diet and Exercise: Managing the many side effects of chemotherapy was difficult at times but I was able to cope through nutrition and exercise (yes, the medications also help). I stayed away from alcohol for the whole time, enjoyed protein shakes in the morning and did my best to stay focused on unprocessed foods. Plenty of water was essential.

Physical exercise: To manage the exhaustion during chemo, I incorporated a daily walk. Even when I couldn't get off the couch (and it was hard most days), my support was there to make sure I went for a walk. What a difference that made! Walking also helped me sleep better, and when you sleep better, it just makes a positive difference.

Following chemotherapy was the decision to take tamoxifen. The side effects hit me hard. They included bone pain and aches, and overall energy depletion (also due to the after-effects of chemotherapy). I was back at work when I started tamoxifen, so a combination of all that I had to manage that year, a very demanding work role, and then medication that affected me so physically was a lot to take. So much so that I really didn't have the energy to even consider doing anything about it. I was like this for about two years, and then I finally had had enough. I was tired of saying I'm tired and I was frustrated that I was unable to get up off the floor when playing with my granddaughter. I was feeling so exhausted that I couldn't exercise, which wasn't helping with my overall mental health.

Finally, I did research on food and inflammation and I had a light bulb moment. I thought, "That is what my problem is: inflammation. It's why I can't move!" I decided to do an elimination diet and removed gluten, dairy, sugar, eggs, and corn to see if it would make a difference. Within days I could move again – I could not believe it. I was slowly getting my energy back and then moving more (doing more exercise) which gave me even more energy! And I lost some weight along the way (bonus). I gradually introduced some things back into my diet over a few months and determined that I could not tolerate gluten (joint pain reduced) or dairy (less stomach problems). Sugar also bothers me and depletes my energy but that has been harder to give up (as I write this I'm eating dark chocolate.) I'm a work in progress.

Supplements: Another outcome of the treatments is brittle nails. My nails have never been the same and I don't know if they ever will be. I recently started to take collagen supplements in my daily protein shake in hopes that they will help. I also regularly take calcium, magnesium, a probiotic, and vitamin D and am exploring adding fish oil.

Put it on Hold: I had a reconstruction surgery date booked and then I cancelled – I have decided I'm not ready for further surgery and maybe I never will be and that is okay.

Taking control of what I could to gain normalcy in my life made a difference to me and my overall well-being and has helped me to be resilient and remain hopeful each day. I haven't stopped exploring more options to help me manage ongoing symptoms: next is yoga and meditation. I'm a work in progress and committed to taking control of what I can!

Depression, anxiety and ways to cope



If you're a breast cancer patient who's experiencing significant depression or anxiety, you're not alone. Roughly one-quarter of breast cancer patients get help for anxiety or depression during their treatment. There are many reasons a person may feel anxious or depressed because of their cancer diagnosis. Ending your treatment or finding out that your treatment is not working can bring about stress and anxiety. Other cancer symptoms like pain, mouth sores or menopausal symptoms can add to these feelings of anxiety if you feel like you can't change or alleviate them. Your cancer symptoms can also lead to feelings of depression. If you feel like you don't have someone who understands or can listen to your fears these can have a significant toll on your mood and outlook on life.

The good news is that help is available. First let's look at the difference between depression, anxiety, panic attacks and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) so that you can better identify what you're feeling. Then we will look at ways to address them.

Symptoms of clinical depression include at least two weeks of unusual sadness or diminished interest in everyday activities, as well as five of the following: changes in appetite or weight loss/gain; disruptions to your regular sleep patterns including fatigue or insomnia; feelings of extreme guilt, hopelessness, or worthlessness; not being able to concentrate or having trouble making decisions; and frequent thoughts of death or suicide beyond a fear of death.

Anxiety disorders can take several forms and are common after a cancer diagnosis. A person can develop generalized anxiety disorders, panic attacks or post-traumatic stress disorders. Symptoms of a generalized anxiety disorder include excessive worrying for at least 6 months and an inescapable sense of nervousness. Symptoms can also include: edginess or restlessness; fatigue; trouble concentrating; irritability, sore muscles, or insomnia.

Panic attacks are acute episodes of sudden and intense fear. They usually peak within 10 minutes and can include a pounding heart, sweating, nausea, shortness of breath, feeling dizzy, chest pain, and trembling. Having an isolated attack is not typically something to worry about but if you are experiencing regular panic attacks that are interfering with your daily life it is important to discuss them with your healthcare team.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder commonly associated with soldiers and war but there are many life-altering traumatic events that can bring on PTSD symptoms including a cancer diagnosis. Symptoms of PTSD can include flashbacks or intrusive thoughts and memories, feeling numb and detached, or experiencing sudden fits of anger.

While some sadness or anxiety is normal when you have breast cancer, it is important to get help immediately if you are experiencing severe depression or thoughts of suicide. If this is the case for you, ask your oncology team to refer you to the psychosocial oncology department or patient and family support service at your cancer centre. Here trained professionals are skilled at assisting people to receive the help they are seeking.

There are medications your doctor can prescribe that are designed to help mood disturbances caused by chemical imbalances in the brain. But there are many things you can do on your own to help alleviate your sadness, fear and anxiety.

Getting support from your family, friends or from fellow breast cancer patients and survivors not only allows you to talk about your feelings but it can show you that others are feeling the same way. Talking to support groups can help you find hope and new ways of coping with your feelings. Alternatively, keeping a journal can help you track your moods and give you the ability to release thoughts and feelings you are not comfortable sharing with others.

There are many relaxation exercises that can help improve your mood and reduce your feelings of anxiety and stress. A few common ways people cope with their anxiety and depression are:

- Yoga
- Meditation
- Massage
- Qigong
- Music or Art Therapy

You can find out more about these and other forms of relaxation therapies in our [Complementary Therapies](#) section.

Small changes to your lifestyle may also help to relieve symptoms of depression or anxiety. Eating well-balanced meals can help boost your energy and improve your mood. Alcohol and caffeine may trigger panic attacks or other episodes of anxiety so try to stick to water or juice. Daily exercise or physical activities like walking or mild aerobics can release endorphins. You may not feel up to exercising right away but the more you do it, the better you will feel. Plus, exercise can help you get a better night's sleep and improve symptoms of fatigue during the day. Talk to your doctor first about what types of exercises are safe if you've had surgery or are still in treatment.

Finally, trying to tackle your other cancer related symptoms may help improve your mood or anxiety. If you're feeling anxious or helpless because you can't sleep or are sleeping too much, talk to your doctor about ways to improve your sleep patterns. If you are feeling pain, mouth sores, lymphedema, or neuropathy there are things you can do to help alleviate these symptoms. Talk to your doctor, visit online discussion groups and read blogs like ours to find ways to manage these symptoms. We're doing a whole series on managing the side effects of cancer so check in on our blog often to find new ways to cope.

Overcoming the lasting side effects of breast cancer

Wendie Hayes of Stoney Creek Mountain, Ontario was diagnosed in 2011 with triple negative metaplastic phyllodes breast cancer at the age of 55 after she discovered a lump in her left breast. Her cancer is a rare type, affecting less than one percent of breast cancer patients, so it took some time to get the right diagnosis. Even so, she was prepared for side effects from chemotherapy but didn't expect the anxiety, depression and cancer-related brain fog to last years after treatment ended.

She was given three rounds of chemotherapy, but the tumour was still growing, so the chemotherapy was stopped. In December 2011, she had a left breast mastectomy, followed by a second surgery in February 2012 to test her underarm lymph nodes for cancer. In April 2012, she started radiation therapy.

"My whole life changed because of the brain fog and memory loss," says Wendie. She used to be able to handle multiple tasks at the same time at her job. Now with difficulty focusing on even a single task and to think of simple words she wants to say, she has not been able to continue working. Past loves like reading became difficult because she couldn't follow the story line.

During treatment, she was isolated outside of hospital visits and developed agoraphobia. Now knowing that the sudden bursts of anxiety and nausea is a side effect of this, she has developed some coping skills but finds that some large crowds of people and noise levels can trigger episodes.

Depression is also a lingering side effect that first appeared after cancer treatment ended. "When you're fighting for your life during treatment, that takes priority," says Wendie. However, when the busy treatment schedule ended, "Cancer started to play on my mind." To cope, Wendie tries to keep busy and active and not dwell on these difficulties and has been prescribed a low-dose antidepressant to help alleviate these symptoms. "Don't be too proud to ask for help," she says.

For six months after surgery, Wendie couldn't use her arm properly. She had a frozen shoulder and lymphedema, for which she had physiotherapy, lymphedema massage, and gentle yoga, and she exercised with stretch bands to help strengthen the weakened areas. Six years out she still has issues with the left arm.

Other side effects of treatment included broken nails and loss of all her hair, including nose hair and ear hair. "My nose was always dripping and sounds were amplified," says Wendie.

She also suffers from sleep disturbances. "It's rare to have a full night's sleep now," she says.



Wendie says her body image suffered as a result of her mastectomy and after the second surgery. "It was awful after. I couldn't stand looking at myself, because one side was flat and the other side was normal. I thought I was prepared for the visual effect of seeing this void because I just wanted the cancer removed."

She tried wearing a prosthesis, but found it heavy and hot in the summer. Wendie had breast reconstruction with tissue expanders and an implant. However, because her pectoral muscles were well-developed, they caused the implant to bulge at the top. "It was odd-looking and very uncomfortable," she says. She plans to have another surgery to see if the problem can be corrected.

One day Wendie had what she thought was a migraine. She went home to rest. When she woke up the next morning, her vision was foggy and writing looked strange. The next day, when the problem persisted, Wendie went to see her optometrist, who said her vision problem was due to age and a floater and sent her home. The symptoms persisted, so Wendie saw another optometrist, who told her to go to the emergency room. There, an oncology ophthalmologist confirmed that she had had a stroke in her right eye. Today, she has very little vision in that eye. Her distance judgement and depth perception is poor.

Wendie didn't know that a stroke was a possible risk of cancer treatment. She would like to see more information upfront about the possible impacts and risks associated with treatment.

"Information for patients is key, and preparing yourself with questions is vital." She would also like more upfront information about the costs of treatment. For her, chemotherapy and related medication cost \$1900 per treatment. Her insurance paid the cost, but she is concerned for others who might not have insurance coverage.

"Information sessions need to be more personalized for individuals starting on this journey, and for individuals who have a language barrier, this can be extremely daunting." Wendie was able to even speak to the pathologist who made the final call on the type of cancer she had. "Just ask, your team is there to help you in any way they can."

Wendie is grateful for the wonderful care she received at the Juravinski Cancer Centre. Her healthcare team took time to talk with her and answer all her questions at every stage of treatment. "You as the patient have the right to ask," she says. "You put your body in their hands and hope they'll do right by you and they did."

Wendie couldn't have fought so hard without the support of her husband, John, who went with her to all her appointments, and was present at all the scans so he could understand exactly what was happening. "I couldn't have done it without John," she says. "My husband, daughter and son were amazing and our very dear friends, too. Dinners would arrive at the door or they would sit with me if my husband had to be out. I had an amazing group of people around me and for my family as well." After treatments she held a 'big bash' for the people who supported the family as a whole to thank them for being there.

To help others as she had been helped, Wendie started a charitable project in Hamilton, Ontario called [Bras for Buddies](#), which provides a free mastectomy bra to low or no income women. The project is run through the Cancer Assistance Program.

Before cancer, Wendie says she was like "an octopus on steroids," always busy and multi-tasking. Even though she now has less stamina and life is at a slower pace, "It made me stop and appreciate the simpler things in life: sitting outside watching the birds and Monarch migration, gardening, crosswords, reading again and just taking a breath. I don't take things for granted and I always greet the morning and evening with thanks for giving me another day, because one never knows what may happen."

How I regained control of my life when breast cancer made me feel like I had lost it

By **Stéphanie Deraïche**



My journey began on New Year's Eve 2015, when I noticed a red mark on my right breast. It wasn't long before my stomach dropped and I felt my face flush while my throat did that swallowing action reserved for moments just like this.

The skin was thick, but no "peau d'orange". I felt a lump under my breast, and another smaller one just under the areola. Google was clear: it was either breast cancer or mastitis, and although I hadn't breastfed my daughter in some 18 years, I decided it was mastitis. I then put the whole thing aside in favor of ringing in the New Year, knowing there wasn't anything I could do until the following Monday anyway, when my breast clinic would be open.

Over the next couple of days, I might have looked at my breast three times. I didn't see the need to torture myself, so I didn't. Besides, I had been through something similar 10 years prior, and the little growth was benign. I was being followed yearly since then, so nothing to worry about, right?

Wrong.

Monday, January 4, 2016, a mammogram showed no change in my breast since June 2015. No change. Hooray! Right?

Wrong.

An ultrasound revealed the lump, but my surgeon wasn't convinced it was cancer. We went ahead and did a biopsy.

On January 7, 2016, I got confirmation that I had cancer. Suddenly, I was in a daze. The next steps were to wait for a call from the clinic to schedule a battery of tests to determine the extent of the disease. "We need to see if it spread."

My tests were scheduled for January 14, the results of which would only be ready on January 21. Looking back, I don't know how I got through the next two weeks.

Tests showed that for all intents and purposes, the cancer was limited to the breast. In the clear! Right?

Wrong again!

After surgery, I was ready for chemotherapy. Bring it on, I said! "Oh, but now we have to wait for the results." What results? It's cancer! Chemo please! "No, no, we have to see how aggressive it is, what type it is, etc." There are not only different stages of breast cancer, but different grades and types, something about receptors.

The biopsy had already revealed that my hormone receptors were positive, which "was a very good sign". Okay, so something's good about this cancer. Seemed a tad oxymoronic to me, but I welcomed the good news.

Surgery (mastectomy) revealed that four nodes tested positive for cancer, after a total of 12 were removed. I was estrogen receptor positive, progesterone receptor positive and HER2 negative, and the grade was somewhere between a 1 and 2. The

margins were clear.

Okay, now can we do chemotherapy?

No, I had to recover from surgery.

Two weeks after surgery, it all came crashing down. Almost overnight, I went from warrior woman to alternate states of severe anxiety and near catatonia. It was debilitating. I lost 30 pounds. Eating my favorite breakfast, toast with peanut butter, became a chore.

I went on to suffer from severe anxiety from that moment to the day of my second of eight rounds of chemotherapy. While I received excellent care throughout my journey, I felt that I wasn't afforded much in the way of understanding for my anxiety. My pivot nurse didn't seem to want to deal with me, which only made me feel worse. I felt that some of my reactions were being judged, even though I was battling a deadly disease.

It was unbearable.

Nobody *wants* to be anxious – nobody *likes* being anxious.

Not to be overlooked was the fact that I had lost both my parents to cancer within five and eight weeks of diagnosis. I didn't think I'd see my 46th birthday.

Oddly enough, it was my tough-talking oncologist who put me at ease and was the most understanding of my anxiety. Her recognition that nobody could judge my reaction without being in the same position and her validation of my anxiety made all the difference.

If you had asked me before I was diagnosed how I would navigate my journey, I certainly would have told you that I'd crush the disease and do it laughing the entire time. Surprise!

Getting to know and understanding what exactly was happening to me was key. At first, I only wanted to be told that I would be okay, and that was enough for me. But then when I realized that I had an important part to play in my treatment, recovery, and prevention of recurrence, I began looking to understand my role better and to learn what I actually could control. This is huge for any cancer patient.

Surgery and treatments are proactive. After treatment is done, cancer patients are often left with a "what now" feeling. One way to remain proactive is to eat well and exercise, as we know that these things keep us well and help prevent recurrence. I do this, and it truly makes me feel empowered. Yoga is an excellent way to reconnect with your body after treatment and to stay connected with it long after surgery.

In addition to this, I joined a dragon boat team of breast cancer survivors. These women, my teammates, have shown me just what is possible after breast cancer, and their example has shaped my recovery. Without having to make your entire life about breast cancer, there is definite value in surrounding yourself with positive, active survivors. Nobody can understand me like they can.

I can't totally control whether the disease comes back, but doing everything in my power makes me feel proactive, which in turn helps me stay positive and calm.

What is Chemotherapy Induced Peripheral Neuropathy (CIPN)?

Some forms of chemotherapy can affect or cause damage to your nerve endings, most commonly your sensory nerves. Your sensory nerves tell your brain to feel certain sensations such as touch, heat, cold and pain. When these nerves are damaged, you can have difficulty feeling these sensations correctly. It can lead to tingling, burning or numbness in your hands or feet, usually starting with your toes or fingers and gradually moving toward the centre of your body. It can cause debilitating pain, difficulty feeling hot or cold temperatures and can reduce your motor functioning.

While neuropathy cannot be cured, there are ways to manage your pain. For many with CIPN, your symptoms often dissipate 3-6 months after treatment ends. But for some, including people who have metastatic disease, your neuropathy may not go away at all. Here's some tips for managing your pain.

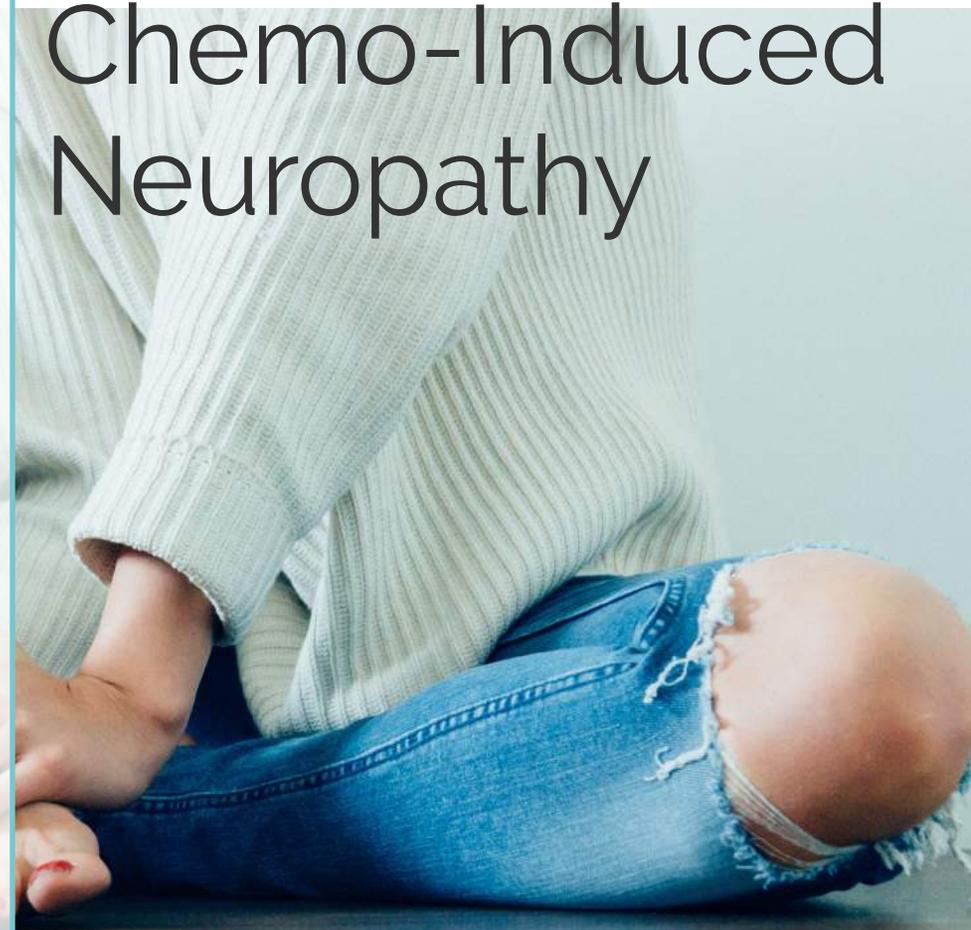
Protection

If you're experiencing neuropathy in your feet it's important to find comfortable fitting shoes and socks. You'll want to buy shoes with a wide edge, ample space around your toes and good arch support. Consider wearing diabetic socks which are specifically designed to help with neuropathy in your feet. They offer a proper fit, soft material and fewer seams that can reduce the pain and potential injury caused by ill-fitting, uncomfortable socks. Proper fitting shoes and socks can help to reduce the pain you're feeling.

Be mindful when you come in contact with potentially extreme hot or cold temperatures. Because of the reduced sensation, you might not notice when water or kitchen items are too hot which could lead to unseen burns. The same is said for extreme cold temperatures. Be sure to keep your extremities covered and warm during the winter months to avoid frostbite.

As much as possible, try to avoid injury to your hands or feet. Ensure your house is well lit, and remove any potential tripping hazards. Be careful using sharp objects and try to wear gloves when gardening or washing dishes. Inspect your hands and feet regularly to ensure that you have not cut or burned your skin. Oftentimes, the numbness or tingling can cause injuries to go unnoticed.

Helping you live better with Chemo-Induced Neuropathy



Integrative Medicines

There are several types of integrative approaches you can take to help alleviate pain from your neuropathy. Massage can potentially help to improve your circulation, decrease pain, lower anxiety or depression and increase flexibility. [Evidence](#) suggests that forms of relaxation therapies including meditation, yoga and Reiki can have a positive effect on reducing pain and also on reducing the anxiety caused by the pain of neuropathy.

Acupuncture, a key part of Traditional Chinese Medicine, has become more and more accepted in western medicine with many studies (see [here](#) and [here](#)) proving its positive affect on improving a wide range of symptoms and side effects, including chemo induced neuropathy. It has been shown to not only reduce neuropathic pain but improve functioning in the effected areas.

Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) is a form of therapy that sends small currents of electricity to nerves in the affected area. [Studies](#) have shown that it can be used successfully to treat nerve pain and increase functioning.

Be sure to speak with your doctor first if you're interested in trying these integrative approaches to your pain management.

Exercise

Peripheral neuropathy can sometimes cause balance and mobility issues. Physical therapy can help to strengthen your weakened muscles and improve your motor functioning. Physical therapists can teach you balance training exercises that can help with your stability and safe stretches to help with your range of motion. Alternatively, an occupational therapist can help you learn self-care and safety techniques so that you can avoid trips or falls. They can also help to improve your sensory and motor skills and they can teach you techniques for everyday tasks that you may now struggle with. Talk with your doctor about finding a physical or occupational therapist that specializes in chemo induced peripheral neuropathy.

Supplements

There are many supplements available that are known to help reduce the side effects of neuropathy, prevent further deterioration of your nerves and potentially help heal the damage caused by CIPN. It is imperative to note that a discussion with your doctor and your pharmacist should be had *before* taking anything. They would know best whether these supplements may interfere with your current treatment. Here's a short list of supplements you can talk with your healthcare team about:

Alpha-lipoic acid is commonly used when people suffer from diabetic neuropathy. It is an antioxidant that helps fight 'free radicals' - molecules that can damage cells. It can help to relieve pain and tingling. Additionally, *Evening primrose oil*, another supplement commonly used for diabetics, is a source of essential fatty acids that are an important in protecting the membranes of nerve cells. It can also help to relieve pain and improve nerve functioning. This [study](#) suggests that they both have the potential to aid in symptom management of CIPN.

Omega-3 fatty acids, like eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), are other essential fatty acids that our bodies do not create on our own but are beneficial to our health. [They are known](#) to be an essential part of the protection of our cell membranes which, in turn, helps protect nerve cells and decrease the risk of cell death. They are found in fish, fish oils,

nuts, certain vegetables and flax seeds and [can help protect](#) against neuropathy from further damaging your nerve cells during chemo.

L-glutamine has several benefits to cancer patients including helping to prevent and reduce effects of neuropathy. L-glutamine is an amino acid that is essential in the production of proteins. It is not entirely known why it can be helpful in preventing neuropathy but it is [speculated](#) that it plays a “neuroprotective role, possibly due to the upregulation of nerve growth factor”.

The *B6 vitamin*, in low-doses, has been known to help aid in reducing neuropathy symptoms. [It is said](#) to play a role in helping your nervous system and if you are deficient in B6, taking extra may help to reduce your symptoms. [Dana-Farber](#) warns that higher doses may contribute to neuropathy so it's especially important to discuss taking a B6 vitamin with your healthcare team first as is only beneficial if you are already lacking in this vitamin.

There are many vitamins and other supplements that may contribute to reducing your neuropathy pain. Speak to your healthcare team about what might be beneficial to you.

Medications

While there are no specific medications developed to treat neuropathy, there are over-the-counter and prescribed medications that may help reduce the effects of neuropathy. [Mayo Clinic](#) suggests pain relievers like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) can help with mild symptoms. There are other medications such as anti-seizure and anti-depressants that can be prescribed to help relieve nerve pain.

There are topical medications that may help relieve nerve pain including capsaicin cream. [Capsaicin](#) is found in chili peppers and is often used to treat shingles pain because it eases affected nerves near the surface of your skin. Other topical creams like udder cream may also relieve your nerve pain. Many people have also found success with [udder cream](#), a cream that was originally designed for cows until it's benefits were found to be effective for people.

Changes to Treatment

While no one wants to change or adjust their treatments, you may find that it can help alleviate your symptoms. If your pain becoming unbearable and alternative options have not helped talk to your doctor about alternative treatments that may not affect you as much. People have also found success in simply changing the frequency and dosage of their chemo to lessen their symptoms.

Prevention

If you are just beginning your treatment or are just starting to notice minor, yet manageable symptoms of neuropathy many of the above supplements and creams may help to protect you from future damage to your nerve cells. Cryotherapy – the use of cold temperatures to prevent damage to your cells - may also help in preventing neuropathy while you are receiving chemo. Similar to cold cap therapy (for the prevention of hair loss during chemo), [frozen gloves or socks](#) can decrease the blood flow in your hands and feet and therefore potentially reduce the toxicity caused by your chemotherapy.

Finding successful ways to prevent or manage your neuropathy symptoms can be a form of trial and error but there are lots of ways to help alleviate your pain. Talk with your doctor about what might work best for you.

Nerve damage is a little-known side effect of radiation

About 10 years ago, Charlotte Pennell was pruning bushes in her garden in Winnipeg. One branch seemed especially tough to cut. Then she looked down and saw that she was cutting her finger. She was horrified that she had so little feeling in her hand.

Since 2007, this breast cancer survivor has lived with nerve damage, pain, and numbness in her left hand and arm that interfere with all aspects of her daily life. She has trouble dressing, doing up buttons, and putting on earrings. She has trouble using a knife to chop up food. She can't lift heavy items or reach above her head. She had to trade in her manual transmission car for an automatic.

She also had to give up a lot of the physical activities that she enjoyed. She can no longer kayak, box, or paddle with her dragon boat team, Chemo Savvy. Running is out of the question because she might fall. Instead, she does modified yoga, goes for walks, and swims using her good arm.

Charlotte lives with a condition called radiation-induced brachial plexopathy. This is a rare side-effect of radiation treatment for breast cancer that affects approximately 1 percent of breast cancer patients. It occurs when radiotherapy damages the brachial plexus. This is an area on each side of the neck where nerve roots from the spinal cord split into each arm's nerves.

Charlotte's condition is so rare that the Canadian Cancer Society couldn't find a volunteer with the same disorder to offer her peer support. Most of her medical team didn't know how to help her either. Doctors suggested that she had a pinched nerve or that she had overused her shoulder through dragon boating. They did a brain scan to see if she had a brain tumour. She was even screened for a heart attack.

For seven years, Charlotte sought a diagnosis. Then a nurse at the Cancer Care Manitoba Breast & Gynae Cancer Centre of Hope referred her to a radiation oncologist at CancerCare Manitoba, who listened to her and made the proper diagnosis. Charlotte was grateful to know that her difficulties finally had a name.

There is no cure for brachial plexopathy. Charlotte manages the pain with medication. Finding the right medication has been a challenge. "Nerve pain doesn't respond to typical pain medications," she says. Also, with too much medication, she becomes clumsy and loses her balance. Too little and the pain is too much. It's only this year that she has finally found the right dose.



Charlotte was diagnosed with Stage IIb breast cancer in 2001. She found a lump in her breast and went for a mammogram and biopsy, which confirmed the diagnosis. She then had a mastectomy, chemotherapy, and radiation.

Since her cancer was estrogen receptor positive, she took tamoxifen for two years and an estrogen inhibitor for four years.

In 2003, concerned about a possible recurrence, she underwent a prophylactic mastectomy. She thought it was better to have the surgery while she was relatively young and strong.

She didn't have reconstruction and only wears prostheses when she wants to dress up. "I'm not that concerned about my appearance," she says.

It wasn't until 2007 that the brachial plexopathy showed up.

Charlotte wishes her doctors had told her about brachial plexopathy before she started radiation treatments. "I don't remember anyone telling me that nerve damage is a side effect of radiation," she says. "A more in-depth explanation might be in order."

She asked her doctors why they didn't explain the risk of nerve damage. "They said they didn't want to scare me." Charlotte says she still would have had radiation treatments, but she would have liked to be better informed.

Because of her breast cancer experience, Charlotte says she's learned to be more assertive. "If I disagree with something, I don't put up with it. I'm more self-aware and I take care of myself better. I eat better. I'm a lot more physically fit. I avoid stress. I make sure that I do things I like and avoid things I don't like."

A retired teacher, she feels grateful that she has the resources to be able to hire people to clean her house and shovel her driveway. She can also call on her son and daughters for help. "I can save my arm for other things," she says.

Charlotte, who is 71, doesn't know at what speed her brachial plexopathy will progress, so she lives day to day. Currently she

Tips for managing fatigue



Cancer related fatigue is so much more than just feeling tired from a long, hard day. Your cancer treatment can cause you to experience what feels like full body exhaustion. You're so exhausted that you can't get out of bed and no amount of rest will give you back your energy.

This is more common than you think. According to [Cancer Research UK](#), 7-8 out of every 10 people with cancer suffer from fatigue. It's so common because nearly all of your treatments can cause it. You can often feel fatigued after the first few days of your chemo infusion and your radiation will gradually cause the fatigue to worsen leaving lasting effects. Other side effects of treatment also cause fatigue, like anemia. We know cancer treatment causes fatigue but we don't know why or how. This means that completely eliminating fatigue is difficult. But there are ways to help you manage and improve your energy levels.

Exercise. While it sounds disadvantageous, exercise can actually help to improve and increase your energy. It's important to start small, even if you were physically active before your cancer. Walking – even on days where all you can manage is to the end of your driveway, is enough help you both mentally and physically. Once your energy improves, gradually increase the amount of exercise you are doing. Find an exercise partner to help motivate you on the days where you really don't want to get out of bed. If you've had surgery or suffer from weak or brittle bones because of your cancer, talk to your doctor first to see what kind of exercises are safe for you.

Nutrition. There are tons of energy boosting foods that can help relieve your symptoms of fatigue. From protein-rich foods like fish, chicken and eggs to fiber-rich foods like whole grains, legumes and lentils a healthy diet can significantly improve your energy levels. The difficulty many people have when suffering from fatigue is that you don't have the energy to go out, buy these foods and prepare

them. It can seem utterly daunting. There are ways to get the nutrients you need for those days when your energy is at an all-time low. By eating small, frequent meals or snacks you are able to intake food without much effort. Eating fiber-rich cereals or snacking on nuts requires little to no preparation. Buying canned beans or lentils gives you a protein boost that also does not require a lot of preparation. (But be careful to eat canned goods in moderation as they can be high in sodium.) Once your energy levels start improving, you'll be able to be more involved in meal prep and maintaining better energy levels.

Treat your other side effects. Fatigue can be caused by other treatment side effects so tackling these might improve your energy. Anemia, a low red blood cell count, can leave you feeling exhausted. Changes in your diet, particularly increasing your iron intake, can easily treat anemia. Adding foods to your diet that are rich in iron or taking an iron supplement can help dramatically but speak with your doctor before taking any new medicines or supplements.

Depression can often be confused as fatigue because the symptoms are similar. Seeking a counsellor or speaking about your feelings of depression to your loved ones can improve your wellbeing far beyond your exhaustion.

Experiencing significant pain caused by your treatment can also hinder your mobility and increase your exhaustion. Coping with your pain while doing everyday activities can take a lot out of a person.

Energy conservation. Have you ever heard of [The Spoon Theory](#)? It's the concept that a person who is living with a chronic illness only has so much energy to give during a day. The author, Christine, explains that when she wakes up in the morning she only has a certain amount of "spoons" (spoons = energy). Simply getting out of bed or brushing your teeth will use up your "spoons", leaving you depleted of energy to do anything else important that day. Planning ahead, scheduling rest and remembering to pace yourself can help preserve your energy for the things that you want or need to do that day.

Here are some other everyday tips that can help you increase your energy and improve your quality of life:

- Avoid drinking caffeine before bed.
- Take short naps during the day, and try to sleep for a full 7 to 8 hours at night.
- Drink lots of water.
- Do your exercises at home instead of at a gym.
- Notice the times of the day when you have the most energy, and schedule activities during those times.
- Check with your doctor to make sure you don't have an infection.
- Have your cancer treatments at the end of the day so you can go home to bed directly afterwards.

A Running Thread

By Mary Gauvreau

It's good to set challenging goals.

I ran my first marathon the year I turned 50, and completed another two years later. I loved establishing training goals that would force me to push myself physically, and feeling healthy and strong as the result of running regularly. In November 2015, I decided on a new goal: to run another marathon in the fall of 2016, and complete it with a time fast enough to qualify for the Boston Marathon.

November 2015 also meant a screening mammogram for me. Unlike previous years, the test was followed by a second mammogram and a breast biopsy. On Christmas Eve 2015, I received my diagnosis of breast cancer over the phone in a call from my nurse practitioner.

That Christmas was difficult for me. The diagnosis left me feeling sad and angry and afraid. Because of the holiday, I waited almost three weeks before meeting with my surgeon, not knowing how serious the cancer was, and what the treatment plan would be. I dealt with this period of uncertainty by focussing on being active outdoors with family, spending time with my husband and two young adult daughters cross-country skiing.

I felt reassured once I finally met with the surgeon. His explanations were clear, and he answered all of my questions. A lumpectomy and sentinel node dissection was scheduled for February, and would likely be followed by radiation. It appeared that things would get back to normal quickly.

That surgery found cancer in my lymph nodes, and the margins from the lumpectomy were not clear. My cancer was Stage II ductal and lobular carcinoma that was hormone receptor positive.

My treatment plan now changed. I would have eight rounds of chemotherapy once every two weeks from April to July 2016, followed by a mastectomy in August and radiation in October and November.



The new treatment plan was a big switch, and was going to affect my life more than I originally thought. My goal of running a fall marathon and qualifying for the Boston marathon was displaced, so I adopted a new goal: to get through treatment, regain strength and fitness, and then run another marathon.

The first hurdle to get through was the chemotherapy. I wanted to stay as active as I could during treatment, and I was convinced that spending time outdoors would be good for me mentally. I set the goal to get outside and walk every day. Many days I was able to run or swim, but even on bad days I got out for a short walk with a friend. I also found it helpful to focus on "the big picture", how chemotherapy treatment would lead to a big long-term payoff in terms of health. My mantra became "Get through this, and run another marathon."

Over the next few months, through chemotherapy and mastectomy surgery, I continued to exercise, but by the start of radiation in October 2016 the cumulative fatigue associated with cancer treatment was taking its toll. It was getting harder and harder to get myself out the door to stay active. I remained convinced of the benefits of exercise, but I found that I needed help to stay motivated. Unable to train with my regular running group, I joined Start Smart, a run/walk group for beginner runners through the [Ottawa Running Club](#). That way, I had to get up in the morning, put on my running shoes, and meet the group, even if I wasn't feeling well. Having an outside motivator became very important for me at this point. No matter how bad things were, I knew that I needed to go outside and exercise if I was going to keep my energy up and stay positive.

The end of treatment was the most difficult stage in my cancer journey. I had hoped that when I completed my final radiation session in November 2016 that everything would quickly return to normal, but I was exhausted and experiencing cancer-related brain fog. After a few more months, not only was I fatigued, but my spirits were low. I felt frustrated, as I had not realised that I would have to fight so hard and long to get back to where I was before in terms of energy and cognitive level.

Once again, I turned to exercise to help combat the still present side effects of cancer treatment. My marathon goal seemed way out of reach, so I set smaller running goals, found new running partners, and registered for some shorter races to keep my motivation level high.

I credit exercise with helping to alleviate the fatigue, brain fog and depression that I experienced, but it was not the only factor. I also sought assistance from some local resources. An excellent source of support was the Cancer Coaching at the [Maplesoft Centre](#). This free service turned out to be one of the best things that I did. My cancer coach helped me find the resources that I needed, troubleshoot problems, and make decisions. Group coaching sessions also helped deal with the end of treatment and my return to work. Another helpful resource was a six-week support group at the [Ottawa Integrative Cancer Centre](#). I found it reassuring to hear from other women who shared my experiences with breast cancer.

Over time, I was able to run longer and longer distances. At the end of March 2017, I ran a 5 km race. In April, I tackled the 10 km distance. In May, I ran a half marathon, and in October 2017 I achieved my goal of completing another full marathon.

I continue to place exercise as a priority in my life. This fall I added two weekly strength and fitness classes through [Breast Cancer Action](#) to my routine of running and swimming, and I have already registered for two running races in 2018. I'm still not running as fast as I did before my breast cancer diagnosis, but that just means that I have something to work towards. Whether or not I eventually qualify for the Boston Marathon, being fit, healthy and strong will always be a goal for me.

Is your swollen arm a sign of lymphedema?

If you have had surgery for breast cancer, you are at risk for lymphedema, a chronic swelling of the arm or another body part due to build-up of fluid. (This fluid, known as lymph, transports white blood cells and cellular debris throughout the body.) Removal of lymph nodes under the arm during breast cancer surgery or radiation therapy can cause a blockage in the lymphatic system, which causes lymphedema. It can develop shortly after your surgery or many years later.

Early signs of lymphedema include the following¹:

- Swelling that can be sudden, gradual, or occasional
- Clothing, rings, or a watch that feel tighter, but not due to weight gain
- Feelings of heaviness, tightness, fullness, or heat in the affected area
- Aches, shooting pain, or pins and needles in the affected area
- Skin that feels tight or stretched; sometimes its texture feels thicker

If you experience any of these symptoms, see your doctor. Ask for a referral to a certified lymphedema therapist.

Treatment for lymphedema includes:

- compression bandages and sleeves
- lymphatic drainage (a type of massage designed to stimulate lymph flow and reduce pain)
- exercises to improve the flow of lymphatic fluids
- good skin care to prevent infection

If you have lymphedema, you are at high risk for an infection. Therefore, it is important to avoid cuts, scrapes, and burns, as well as extreme heat or cold. Don't apply heating pads or ice to the affected area, and avoid hot baths and showers, hot tubs, saunas, and swimming pools. Also, where possible, try to have injections, blood tests, or vaccinations in the arm that is not affected. Whenever possible, elevate your affected limb above the level of your heart.

Your certified lymphedema therapist will work with you to develop a treatment plan that is right for you. "Lymphedema is a lifelong condition and managing it takes a lifelong commitment from you. There's a lot to learn at first, but when you take charge, your self-care becomes second nature²."

You are not alone.

Across Canada there are trained lymphedema therapists, patient-focused organizations, and other people living with lymphedema who can help you. Contact your provincial lymphedema association or the Canadian Lymphedema Framework (CLF) at canadalymph.ca to connect with resources in your area.

Surviving breast cancer and living with lymphedema

By **Suzanne Paintin**

January 4, 2010, I became a fly on the wall. I was at my surgeon's getting results from my biopsy. It was supposed to be a quick appointment as the initial needle test of fluid prior to the biopsy was negative for cancer, or so we thought. I remember hearing the doctor telling me "unfortunately it was cancer..." I felt like I was having an out of body experience. I was there but literally watching over my body and the doctor from a distance. My world suddenly changed both physically and mentally.



My journey began with surgery in March 2010 followed by chemotherapy that ironically started April 1- not an April fool's prank.

My first bath in the tub, I found hard physically and mentally. I could barely move. I had lots of bruising and was swollen from surgery, full of staples (stitches). I felt like I had lost control of simple tasks. Luckily my husband was there to help me in and out of the bath as well as to help clean me. We had to make sure not to get any of the surgery area of my body wet at all.

After two weeks of being sick in bed, I had some energy to leave the second floor of our house to go outside for a walk. I was physically unable to open our front door. I found this emotionally upsetting and burst into tears. My husband quickly opened the front door for me and said on the positive note that I was venturing outside. My famous walk took me almost 30 minutes to walk two houses down and back. It was nice to be outside apart from the side effects from the medications which left me overly sensitive to the light, sounds, and smells.

I remember one of my toughest days, I was in so much pain and mental anguish that I thought that God had abandoned me. A few days later, I realized that God had not abandoned me at all. God carried me through the worst days of my life. It was like my favorite poem, "Footprints in the Sand".

After six rounds of chemotherapy, radiation started in August 2010. By December 2010, I was diagnosed with what I like to call my cancer trophy, lymphedema. My breast and arm started to swell and feel heavy. My new norm changed once again.

I am fortunate as I was sent to see a wonderful massage therapist trained in Manual Lymph Drainage. She taught me daily manual drainage exercises. I continue to see her once a month to help maintain my lymphedema. I wear a compression sleeve during the day and wear a night garment.

People ask me what it's like to have lymphedema. It's life changing, but I don't let it stop me. I do things differently. If I can't vacuum my whole house in one day, I break it up over two or three days. I have learned to listen to my body. It's ok to not do everything in one day, and to stop and relax and watch some TV.

I also belonged to a great dragon boat team, Chemo Savvy, a team of dedicated women that are all breast cancer survivors. About a third of the team have lymphedema. It is great exercise for my arm. They taught me to never give up. Chemo Savvy does dry land training in winter, so they are ready to paddle once the snow melts. I have taken a leave from the team while I learn to manage vertigo with some exercises. A few years ago, I had a mishap falling off a ladder in our house during some painting renovations. I plan on returning in a year or two once my kids are a little bit older and I have a bit more time as I have more some outdoor painting on my house to do this year.

I also am part of a support group for lymphedema., We meet every third Tuesday of the month and have great speakers on many health topics. It's a great safe place to share our thoughts and experiences about living with lymphedema.

Each day I have a reminder of my lymphedema. It could be pain in my arm, sore under my arm, sore on my side trunk area or all of them.

I now go to a bra store in Selkirk, Manitoba to get bras that fit better with higher sides, no wires and have good support.

There is a cost associated with everything. I am fortunate as my husband's work insurance covers 80 percent of the compression garments. My latest sleeve cost \$220 and should last approximately three months of wearing every day.

I learned something yesterday attending the Manitoba lymphedema symposium: you can learn to accept living with lymphedema, but you do not have to like it.

Most days are wonderful, and I am so thankful to be alive, but sure there are some frustrating moments or days when it's difficult adjusting to the new norms whether it's lymphedema, vertigo, plantar fasciitis etc. that I have. With the love and support from my family and friends after chemotherapy, I believe I can get through anything. Every day is a great day to be alive, live, love, laugh, and smile.

Constipation – A hard truth

Poop, definitely a topic that most of us don't want to have candid conversations about, especially when it comes to our own. But constipation is one of the most common side effects of many cancer treatments, and can be a real pain in the a**, literally.

All joking aside, there are a several options to help manage constipation and support healthy bowels throughout your various cancer treatments and after.

During active treatment, staying ahead of constipation, is key. If you find that you're constantly dealing with constipation after treatments then trying to prepare your bowels a day or two before your treatment could save you a lot of agony in the long run.

We've put together a list of ways to help you manage constipation caused by cancer treatments.

Food: The number one food to eat to keep you regular is fibre. Fibre-rich foods have long been known to contribute to healthy digestion. Because your body doesn't absorb fibre, it helps by pushing food through your intestines. Legumes (like beans and peas), broccoli, whole grains and nuts are just a few of many foods that are high in fibre. [Unlockfood.ca](https://unlockfood.ca) recommends 25 grams per day for women aged 19-50, and 21 grams for women over 50.

Foods to avoid? Milk, red meat, cheese, and fried foods are high in fat. High fat foods tend to be low in fibre and can slow down your digestion.

Water: Drinking water not only keeps you hydrated but will also help loosen and soften your stool, especially if you're eating a lot of fibre. If you're tired of plain water try adding a piece of lime or lemon to change it up, or try one of [these](#) infused water recipes. Warm drinks also may help stimulate a bowel movement, such as tea, warm juices or warm lemon water.

Laxatives: There are a variety of laxatives that range from pills to liquids to enemas.

You may already be provided with laxative in pill form by your health care team to take prior to, during, or after your treatments. If you aren't receiving laxative in a pill form speak to your health care team about whether or not you may benefit from this.

Enemas may provide faster relief if you are experiencing severe discomfort and pain from constipation; however, it important that you consult with a health care provider prior to taking one, especially if you are in active treatment as they're often not recommended when you're receiving chemotherapy, or must be used in moderation

Magnesium hydroxide: Also known as Milk of Magnesia, magnesium hydroxide helps to relieve constipation by drawing water into the intestines from other areas of your body. It's a fast-acting over the counter laxative that should only be used for occasional constipation. Speak with your doctor first before trying it.

Stool Softener: A stool softener is a mild laxative that softens the stool by moistening it, making it easier to pass. It takes time to work so it should be used if you have mild but chronic constipation. Speak first with your doctor to make sure it's the right laxative for you to take.

Diarrhea – the opposite of constipation



In complete contrast to constipation, diarrhea is also a common side effect of treatment. While many chemotherapies and targeted therapies cause constipation, some of the others cause diarrhea. Loss of bowel control can not only be embarrassing, but it can cause painful cramps and lead to dehydration.

Imodium can be taken over the counter for mild, one-off cases of diarrhea or via prescription for more chronic cases. Speak with your doctor before trying either kind.

Probiotics can aid in healthy digestion because they offer sources of good bacteria. Foods like green olives, dark chocolate and yogurt contain probiotics that might help make your system more regular and ease symptoms of diarrhea.

Other **foods** can lead to good digestion as well. In contrast to constipation, a low-fibre “BRAT” diet may help make your stool firmer. BRAT stands for: banana, rice, applesauce and toast. Breast cancer patients have also found these foods are helpful for combatting diarrhea:

1. Boil one green plantain. Mash it up with one garlic clove and olive oil. Delicious!
2. Try Jello, popsicles, and Gatorade for mild symptoms of diarrhea.
3. Stay away from sugary things, as refined sugar can aggravate diarrhea.
4. Cut out dairy, ice cream, cheese, salt, greasy or fried foods, meats—anything hard on your system.
5. Eat a good bowl of Irish oatmeal (milled finer than regular oats, or cook the oatmeal well). Add pureed coconut, coconut milk, raisins, and dry toasted pecan pieces.
6. Try tuna, plain chicken with rice soup, cooked sweet potatoes, and cooked mushrooms.
7. Avoid alcohol, caffeine and high-fibre foods.

Finally, be sure to drink lots and lots of **water!** Because your body is losing an excess of fluid when you have diarrhea you can be at risk of dehydration. Drinking lots of fluids is key to preventing diarrhea and potentially damaging your kidneys.

If your diarrhea lasts longer than 2 days, you become dehydrated or start showing signs of fever, be sure to speak with your doctor right away.

Both constipation and diarrhea are common, uncomfortable and awkward symptoms of treatment. Hopefully these tips can help relieve your symptoms so you can focus on your treatment.

Tips for managing cancer-related brain fog

One of the most common complaints you hear from patients getting chemotherapy is brain fog. It's why it's most commonly known as "chemo brain". But what is it and why does it happen? And most importantly, how can it be managed?

Cancer-related brain fog is the feeling you get when your mind is hazy or cloudy. You can't quite concentrate like you used to, you have difficulty remember things that occurred recently, or multi-tasking has become more challenging. It's easy to be hard on yourself about these mental changes.

While it's most commonly known as a side effect of chemotherapy, many patients who don't get chemo complain of similar symptoms. There's no definitive explanation for what causes it. If you haven't received chemo it could be caused by other drugs you're taking, the cancer itself, fatigue, low blood count, stress or hormone changes, just to name a few.

It's important to give yourself time to heal. Over time, most patients find that their cognitive abilities improve. But for some, symptoms can continue long after treatment ends. Here are some ways to help you manage your brain fog:

1. Use techniques to help you remember tasks and important dates such as timers, calendars, and post-it notes. This can help you remember day-to-day activities and assist with any short-term memory loss.
2. When you can't think of a word you want to use, the worst thing you can do is try to keep thinking about it. If you go on to something completely different and take some relaxing breathes, the word you were trying to think of will pop back into your mind.
3. Write things down. Try keeping a journal where you can write down important thoughts you'd like to remember.
4. The more you challenge your brain, the better. Puzzles, crosswords and reading can help improve and strengthen your brain.
5. Become more systematic in your daily routine. A regular routine, like taking your pills at the same time every day can help remember what you've done or still need to do.
6. Take advantage of the more lucid times to organize and set up for the times when thinking is more difficult and less reliable.
7. Get enough sleep and try to avoid looking at your phone right before bed.
8. Try speech language therapy or occupational therapy with a specialty in chemo brain. Therapists specializing in cognitive improvements can teach you additional effective strategies to help improve your memory.
9. Sign up for mindfulness meditation classes. Meditation can help you focus your thoughts and improve your attention.

