

# CancerCare Coping Kit

A programme to help  
people overcome the challenges  
of a cancer diagnosis

*So you  
have cancer...  
Now what?*



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## THE CANCERCARE COPING KIT

The CancerCare kit offers information and support to empower individuals to deal with the diagnosis of cancer, its treatment, possible complications and changes in body image, emotions, social issues and how to get assistance. It also provides practical advice to individuals, their loved ones, caregivers and friends to ease the cancer journey and to take control by making informed choices.

This programme contains the following information:

- **Chapter 1:** Celebrating life
- **Chapter 2:** What cancer is, treatments and how to cope with possible side effects
- **Chapter 3:** Coping with the emotional impact of cancer and the importance of communication
- **Chapter 4:** Nutrition, Lifestyle and coping guidelines

### Chapter 1 - Celebrating Life

When all of a sudden you are confronted with the “Big C” or even hear that you are facing death, you may realise life is a gift that cannot be taken for granted. The issue is whether we live every moment as if life is precious and that every moment of life is worth a celebration. If you have not yet appreciated life and its precious moments, it is now time to do so.

It may seem insensitive to speak of celebrating life to someone who has just been diagnosed with cancer. Yet, this is one of the most powerful tools that you can use on your cancer journey. By focusing on wellness on a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual level, you will begin to appreciate and even celebrate life. It is important to experience quality life.

By celebrating life, you reduce stress and strengthen your immune system. By celebrating life, you also take control. This creates a sense of power and meaning at a time where everything seems to have lost its meaning. You learn to value the time you may

have left. A positive attitude will contribute to healing on an emotional and spiritual level.

To believe that you will live, is not a guarantee that you will live. Should you, however, believe that you are going to die; it will negatively impact on your hope and trust of continuing to live.

A well known author, Ruth E Renkel, once said: “You will live longer as soon as you realise that time spent on being unhappy, is wasted.”

We will address the following aspects during this session, namely:

- Identifying and managing stress
- Developing a positive attitude
- Learn to forgive
- Setting goals and making plans for the future
- Finding purpose in your life
- Learning to live in the moment
- Acknowledging the importance of faith
- Promoting physical rest
- Remaining pain free

#### Let's start with stress

Stress is a reaction of the body to the environment. It is linked to your ability to adapt to change. Excessive stress causes you to feel out of control. It develops from illness, loss of loved ones, work problems, daily irritations and unresolved issues, to name a few. High levels of continual stress may depress the immune system and lower your ability to fight illness. Mind and body are connected and just as negative thoughts can adversely affect the immune system, so positive thoughts can benefit you in your fight against cancer.

#### Is all stress always negative?

Short term stress such as exam nerves and interview anxiety can motivate a person to perform well. It is the long term continual stress that lowers your ability to fight disease. It is also the long term, continual stress that may cause you to spin out of control.

#### The use of self-help techniques

As the kids need a ride to school, your spouse demands your attention, you can't find a

specific piece of clothing, your boss has just scheduled a tele-conference meeting and your best friend needs your help – all at the same time!

It may feel as if your world is spinning out of control. Do not panic. This is the time to take a deep breath. Sit and relax in your favourite spot while having a cup of tea.

Like many others, you may have forgotten how to relax. As soon as you feel calm and more relaxed, take a pen and paper and begin to prioritise and plan your day.

Here are some useful tips to alleviate your stress:

**Meditate** - If you think meditation means twisting your body into an uncomfortable position and uttering "oohs" and "omms" for an hour, guess again. Any activity that helps keep your attention calmly in the present moment or even any repetitive action may be a source of meditation.

When you catch yourself thinking about your job, your relationship or your lifelong to-do list, bring your mind back to the present. Try this for just 10 - 15 minutes a day and watch your stress levels drop.

**Breathe Deeply** - Feeling stressed evokes tense, shallow breathing, while being calm is associated with relaxed breathing. So, change the way you breathe to promote relaxation.

**Try this:** Let out a big sigh, dropping your chest, and exhale through gently pursed lips. Inhale, feeling your entire belly, sides and lower back expand. Now exhale, sighing as you drop your chest and feeling your belly, back and sides relax. Repeat these actions 10 times, relaxing more fully each time on exhalation.

**Look Around You** - Mindfulness is the here-and-now approach to living that makes daily life richer and more meaningful. It means approaching life like a child, without passing judgment on what occurs. Mindfulness means focusing on one activity at a time. Staying

focussed on the present can help promote relaxation and provide a buffer against anxiety and depression.

Practice by using your different senses to focus on your immediate surroundings. If you're outdoors, enjoy the shape and colours of flowers, hear a bird's call or consider a tree. In the mall, look at the details of a piece of clothing in the window, touch and examine something attractive and focus on how it's made, or window-shop for furniture, checking out every detail of pattern and style. Sit down in your favourite spot for a tasty cup of tea. As long as you can keep your mind focussed on something in the present, stress will take a back seat.

**Drink a healthy cup of hot tea** - If you're a coffee-guzzler, consider going for tea. Coffee raises levels of the notorious stress hormone, cortisol, while a cup of tea, especially healthy Rooibos tea, offers health and relaxation. Rooibos tea is a traditional favourite for calming the mind and reducing stress. It has been proven to have a positive effect on your immune system and contains lots of antioxidants.

**Show Some Love** - Induce the relaxation response by cuddling your pet, giving an unexpected hug to a friend or family member, snuggling with your spouse, or talking to a friend about the good things in life. When you do, you'll be reducing your stress levels.

**Why?** Experts say social interaction helps your brain think better, encouraging you to see new solutions to situations that once seemed impossible. This contributes to individuals finding it easier to come up with new solutions for apparent irresolvable problems.

**Take Time-Out** - Adults need time-out too. When you sense your temper is flaring, find a quiet place to sit or lie down and put the stressful situation on hold. Take a few deep breaths and concentrate on releasing tension and calming your heartbeat. Quiet your mind and remember take time to relax. The stressful

situation and thoughts can wait.

By practicing the techniques discussed, you will find more peace of mind. Old habits need to be replaced with new ones and this takes a little time. So don't give up, keep reminding yourself to practice your new techniques until they become part of your life.

Empower yourself through knowledge and developing skills that will change negative beliefs and attitudes that will enable you to cope better.

Some people believe that all they have to do to get better, is to visit a doctor and to receive treatment. Your mental state can have a huge influence on your physical wellbeing. To be an active participant in your own cancer journey towards health asks for courage, motivation and perseverance. Many changes may be required in your life and new priorities may have to be identified.

Benjamin Franklin once said: "A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle".

### **Here are some other practical ways of managing your stress**

***Develop time management skills*** - Choose where and how to spend your time and energy. Take time out when you need it.

***Develop a moderate healthy lifestyle*** - Build-up your strength with good nutrition and as much exercise as possible.

***Develop a humorous outlook*** - Learn to laugh and let yourself see the funny side of situations. Laughter is still good medicine. Look for books, people and films that make you feel happy.

***Create a comfortable environment*** - Surround yourself with people and things that you like. Art, music and good books comfort you and feed your soul. Get rid of clutter in your life.

***Ask for help*** - Conserve your energy for important and pleasant activities by delegating. Realise that you don't have to do it all on your own.

***Learn to say 'NO'*** - Don't take on more than you can handle.

### **Develop a positive attitude**

If you believe that you are completely powerless to do anything about your illness, your attitude will become hopeless and helpless. You will find yourself using negative self-talk.

If, however, you believe that you are able to take control of how you deal with your situation, your attitude and self-talk will be more positive.

Direct the "why" of cancer into a "how to".

Recognise that positive opportunities, such as learning new techniques for self care, can arise from a diagnosis of cancer. Convert your worries into positive actions.

After being diagnosed with cancer, you should try and see your life as a cancer journey. Even though you cannot change your diagnosis, you are responsible for what you do on this journey. Each morning decide how you would want your day to be and then try and create it.

What is your attitude to your diagnosis? Instead of letting it terrify you, try and see it as a challenge. By changing your perception, you will find a source of strength you never believed you had.

During a diagnosis of cancer people often feel that they have no choice. You do have a choice - you can decide what your attitude will be during these trying times.

Allow yourself to be sad or angry at times but always set limits and allow yourself the possibility of feeling better tomorrow.

### **Learn to forgive**

First, let's see what we are doing to ourselves by not forgiving. When someone has done something that upsets us, we feel sad, angry and hurt. If we refuse to forgive, we use up energy on staying angry and over time this creates stress in our bodies.

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting what happened to you. It is about healing the memory of what happened to you. It will still be part of your history, but it does not have to dominate your life. By forgiving, you free yourself from the emotions and thoughts of the past.

Madiba has taught us the importance of forgiveness. It is only through forgiveness that South Africa was able to become the rainbow nation. Imagine for a minute the difference in all our lives if Madiba had used his anger, frustration and rage on our nation.

Instead he was able to forgive, set himself free from the past and was therefore able to create a peaceful change in South Africa.

Look at your own life, have you forgiven or are you still angry? Learning to forgive is the most beautiful gift that you are able to give yourself. By forgiving you will feel and become more at peace.

### **Set goals and make plans for the future**

Setting and achieving goals will provide you with focus and direction. Set small goals, for example; "today I will allow myself to relax for ten minutes". When you achieve this goal you feel a sense of control. It gives purpose to your day.

Set bigger goals, perhaps getting together with friend or doing some exercise and work towards them. Each goal you set and achieve is another way of celebrating life.

Plans for the future might need to change to fit in with your new outlook, but don't give up on life and the future. Each goal you set and achieve is another step on the way towards celebrating life.

### **Find purpose in your life**

A cancer diagnosis may jolt you into action. You may feel that since your cancer diagnosis your life has no purpose. It may seem to drift from one day to the next without you thinking of who you were and what contribution you wanted to make to the world. You must,

however, remember that you have valuable knowledge to pass onto others.

Part of your journey is to talk to people who have been diagnosed with cancer and help some of them through this difficult time.

Finding your own purpose in life means celebrating who you are.

What is so unique to cancer survivors is that they find new meaning to life.

### **Learn to live in the moment**

#### ***What does 'living in the moment' mean?***

Do you find yourself being with people but not really listening to them? Do you find that you are distracted and unfocused? Focus all your senses intentionally on the people with you. By doing this whenever possible you will start to experience the fullness of life.

Instead of focussing on the uncertainty of your life ahead, embrace your loved ones and let them fill your life and be thankful for each second that you can be with them.

### **Faith can be of help**

Faith can be a strong support and comfort. No matter what your religion, you will feel more secure and cared for at a time when loneliness can overwhelm you. The practice of prayer and meditation can bring about a sense of inner peace and acceptance. Although medicine may answer many questions, some questions only religion and faith can address.

If someone is sick, they might ask "why is this happening?" If the illness was a common cold, medicine would explain, it's due to a virus. Some might add that a poor diet or compromised immune system contributed to the illness.

When seeking healing, the tools of faith and prayer are powerful. Multiple clinical studies show that those who attend church, synagogue or mosque are ill less frequently. Those who are prayed for tend to heal quicker. Faith and prayer positively influence an individual's

ability to cope with illness and other challenging situations in life. Ultimately, God is the healer of the sick and the helper for those in need.

### **Rest and get enough sleep**

Humans must have 6-8 hours sleep every night to function adequately and remain healthy.

Late night TV, stimulants and meals disrupt the needed cycle required for natural circadian rhythms. It also disrupts the normal production of melatonin, which is our natural sleep hormone. Melatonin has many biological effects and it is also a powerful antioxidant with a particular role in the protection of nuclear and mitochondrial DNA. The formation of Melatonin takes place during the early hours of the night; therefore, every hour of sleep before midnight is worth much more than sleep during the early morning hours.

It's best for our bodies to cycle through the five known sleep stages four or five times a night. The first four stages are key to maintaining healthy metabolism, learning and memory. The fifth, Rapid Eye Movement sleep (REM) is important for regulating mood and forming emotional memories. Missing a cycle will influence your brain function, immune system and heart health negatively.

Take the following steps to improve on your sleeping:

- Exercise regularly, especially before bedtime
- Take an evening walk
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine like reading or taking a bath
- Do not watch TV while in bed, before sleeping
- Have a cup of Rooibos tea an hour before bedtime
- Get to bed at a regular time to ensure at least 6 to 8 hours of sleep
- Create a sleep-conducive environment.

### **Remain pain free**

It can be said that emotional and spiritual pain are just as real as physical pain and ways must be sought to address whatever kind of pain a person may be experiencing.

Health professionals, like the staff and volunteers of CANSA, are experts in palliative care. They can advise you on the latest medications and devices for pain and symptom relief. They can help you work through unresolved issues or practical problems causing distress.

They can also provide instruction on how to assess pain and give suggestions for dealing with it. Finally, chaplains can refer you and can assist family members and spiritual leaders and others to assist you and your loved ones with counselling.

The first step is to get physical pain and symptoms under control. Nurses, together with your doctor, will develop a medication plan that includes long acting medications to maintain comfort and short-acting medications for break-through or acute pain. Medications may be taken orally or topically (through the skin) depending on which method works best for you.

We often hear people express concern about the narcotic nature of some pain medications. Morphine and other pain medications are used in the smallest amounts needed to effectively alleviate pain while maintaining alertness.

Occasionally, a patient develops tolerance to higher doses because of intense pain. Medication dosages are carefully monitored by nurses in collaboration with your doctor, to ensure that you -and your loved ones- remain comfortable.

Medications are based on your need for pain control. Some people choose to tolerate a higher level of pain in favour of remaining more alert. Some people prefer higher levels of medication in order to be completely pain-free. Some people work to achieve pain relief through drugless therapies. The CANSA

counsellor will assist you to achieve your goals for pain control.

Besides medication, there are other methods available to manage pain and associated symptoms. Massage is a proven way to reduce pain and stress, increase relaxation and overall sense of well-being and improve digestion, breathing and sleep. Caregivers may also be able to provide brief respites through shoulder, back and neck or foot massages.

Of course, not all pain is physical. Social workers can help to alleviate the pain that unresolved issues or un-reconciled relationships can cause. A chaplain can provide a listening ear and caring presence for those experiencing the emotional or spiritual distress often associated with a cancer diagnosis.

By practicing the techniques outlined in this programme, you can:

- Gain knowledge and information
- Learn self help strategies that will empower you
- Reduce your long-term stress
- Enhance your body's immune system
- Learn to live positively with cancer and celebrate life
- Remember: cancer can be beaten.

CANSA has several programmes that focus to support cancer survivors and to bring a message of hope to individuals. You are cordially invited to visit one of CANSA'S Care Centres for further assistance and support.

Come and celebrate life with us during one of our CANSA Relay For Life events

### **We wish you Godspeed.**

Contact CANSA for further information and assistance.

### **Remember: cancer can be overcome**

*Ruth E. Renkel said: "Never fear shadows. They simply mean that there's a light shining somewhere nearby".*

## **Chapter 2 - What cancer is, treatments and how to cope with possible side effects**

### **What is cancer?**

Cancer is a general term used for any cells that have lost their normal control mechanisms, causing uncontrolled cell growth in any tissue or organ. There are more than 200 different types of cancers.

Other terms used to describe cancer are malignant tumours and neoplasms. Cancer is not contagious and cannot spread from one person to another. A defining feature is the rapid growth of abnormal cells to form a mass of cancerous tissue that can then invade adjacent tissue and spread to other organs.

The cells that are originally affected by cancer is known as primary cancer. Cancer cells that spread to other parts of the body is referred to as metastasis or secondary tumours. Cancer cells spread via the blood or lymphatic system to other parts of the body. It may also grow into adjacent tissue or organs. Metastasis is the most important cause of death in cancer.

### **General signs and symptoms of cancer**

One should be aware of the general signs and symptoms of cancer. The presence of any of these signs or symptoms does not necessarily mean that the individual has cancer, as these signs and symptoms may be indicative of other health problems. Should you have any of the following signs and symptoms over an extended period of time, you should consult your medical practitioner.

**Fever** - The presence of fever is a general sign in cancer. Persistent fever of unknown origin may be an early sign of cancer; especially in cancer of the blood such as leukaemia. Night sweating is especially experienced by individuals with cancer of the lymphatic system or lymphoma.

**Tiredness** - Persistent tiredness or observable paleness which does not improve with rest, is often seen with leukaemia or cancers that

cause blood loss, such as colon cancer or cancer of the stomach.

**Pain** - Pain, accompanied by swelling, may be an early sign of bone cancer or testicular cancer. A headache that will not dissipate or that does not react to treatment may be a sign of brain cancer. Continued backache may be a symptom of cancer of the colon, rectum or ovaries.

### **Changes of the skin and nails**

Changes in the colour of the skin often appear as a sign of changes in the body. For example, a yellow discolouration of the skin may be an indication of liver problems whilst a blue discolouration of the skin may be indicative of breathing problems or a bruise as a result of one or other blood problems or as a result of a skin problem. Changes in the skin may be the result of a tumour of the skin, sun exposure or the side effects of chemotherapy or radiation therapy. Some changes to the skin may improve over time whilst others may be permanent.

Be on the lookout for:

- Yellow discolouration of the skin and/or the white part of the eye
- Blue or purple bruises of unknown origin
- Red discolouration of the skin that bruises easily or the appearance of a skin rash
- Swelling of the skin that has changed colour
- Itching
- Thickening of the skin
- Changes in colour and texture of the nails

Other general signs and symptoms of cancer may include the following:

- Continued and unexplained weight loss
- Headaches that may be associated with vomiting
- Enlargement of swelling in bones, joints, back and legs
- Lumps or a mass in the abdomen, neck, chest, pelvic area, groin or arm pits
- A white colour behind the pupil of the eye in children
- Continued nausea with or without vomiting
- Unusual changes in stool or the functioning

of the bladder

- Continued coughing or hoarseness
- Continued indigestion, digestive problems or difficulty in swallowing
- A sore that does not heal
- Any unusual bleeding

### **Who gets cancer?**

Cancer knows no boundaries; it affects men, women and children of all ages, colours, cultures and ethnic origin. There is no single cause of cancer. Scientists believe it is the interaction of various factors. Cancer may occur as a result of genetic, physical or environmental factors.

Age is an important factor in the development of cancer. With aging, the body loses the ability to protect or repair itself. Continued exposure to cancer causing agents or carcinogens may also affect the body's immune system, while genetic causes of cancer appear mostly in children.

Let us first discuss the diagnosis, treatment and side effects of treatment before discussing the causes and risk factors associated with cancer.

### **How is cancer diagnosed?**

An evaluation for cancer begins with the taking of a history and physical examination to help the doctor assess the possible risks of cancer and to decide which tests are most appropriate to make a diagnosis.

### **Screening tests for cancer**

Cancer screening tests serve to detect the possibility that cancer is present.

If cancer is detected in its early stages, it can usually be treated more effectively. Screening tests are usually not definitive and results are ultimately to be confirmed or disproved with further examinations or tests.

The two most widely used screen tests for women are the Papanicolaou (PAP) smear test to detect cervical cancer and mammography to detect breast cancer. Both these tests have been successful in reducing the death rate from these cancers.



Measuring the blood levels of Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) is a common screen test for prostate cancer in men. Although the PSA levels tend to be higher in men with prostate cancer, the levels can also be elevated in men with benign enlargement of the prostate gland. Drawbacks to its use are the high cost and the possibility of false-positive results. A more affordable “finger-prick PSA test” is now available.

A common screening test for colon cancer is the checking of stool for occult blood. The positive finding of occult blood is an indication that something is wrong in the colon and may indicate the presence of cancer.

Self examination of breasts, testes, skin, as well as the mouth for sores, could help detect associated cancers in an early stage which will contribute to the more successful treatment of these cancers.

### **Different stages of cancer**

Staging describes the extent or severity of a person’s cancer. Knowing the stage of the disease helps the doctor to plan treatment and estimate the person’s prognosis. Most tumours are described as stage 0, stage I, stage II, stage III, or stage IV, where stage IV is the most advanced stage. Physical examinations, X-rays, scans, laboratory tests, biopsy and surgical reports all provide information to determine the stage of the cancer.

### **Let us look at some of the diagnostic tests that are used to diagnose cancer**

There are a number of ways how cancer can be detected. It can be detected by taking an ordinary X-ray or very sophisticated tests and specific blood tests. When doctors make a diagnosis of cancer, they usually also determine the stages of the cancer.

The first type of test we will discuss is a biopsy. A biopsy is when a small piece of the tumour is removed and looked at under a microscope to determine the type of cancer.

Taking several biopsies, sometimes in different parts of the body, also assists in determining the stage of the cancer.

Another diagnostic test is a CAT scan. A CAT scan (or computerised axial tomography) is a painless, non-invasive test that allows doctors to see inside the body with more clarity than is possible with a traditional X-ray. It combines X-rays and computerised technology to produce cross-sectional image of an area inside the body that is interpreted by a radiologist.

A further diagnostic test is a MRI scan. An MRI (or magnetic resonance imaging) scan is a radiology technique that uses magnetism, radio waves, and a computer to produce images of body structures. The MRI scanner is a tube surrounded by a giant circular magnet. The patient is placed on a moveable bed that is inserted into the tube.

An additional diagnostic test is a mammogram. This is an X-ray picture of the breast by low dose radiation. The breast is compressed during the procedure and may be uncomfortable although not painful for the person.

The last diagnostic test which we will discuss is ultrasound. During an ultrasound procedure, sound waves are caused to travel through tissues and are reflected back where density differs (e.g., the border between a hollow organ’s wall and its inside). The reflected echoes are received by an electronic apparatus that measures their intensity level and the position of the tissue reflecting it. The results can be displayed as still images or as a moving picture of the inside of the body. Unlike X-rays or other ionizing radiation, ultrasound carries minimal, if any, risk.

### **Why is a bone scan sometimes necessary?**

A doctor may order a bone scan for someone who has unexplained skeletal pain suggesting bone loss, bone infection or a bone injury undetectable on a standard X-ray.

A bone scan is also an important tool for detecting cancer that has spread (metastasised) to the bone from a tumour that started in a different organ, such as the breast or prostate gland. Similarly, a bone scan can detect some abnormalities related to leukaemia and lymphoma. It is a nuclear imaging test that helps diagnose and track several types of bone disease.

A bone scan is performed by injecting a small amount of radioactive marker into an intravenous line. Three hours later the patient is placed through a scanner and the radioactive marker will be concentrated in any region where there is increased growth of bone cells also known as high bone turnover. It is a highly sensitive test to pick up tumours, infections or very small fractures because these conditions all result in high bone turnover.

It is a very sensitive test which can show up tumours, infections or tiny fractures. Bone scans, however, cannot distinguish what a lesion represents, and, therefore, cannot differentiate between a tumour, an infection or a fracture. This type of imaging study usually needs to be followed by a CAT scan and/or MRI scan to better identify the lesion.

### **What are tumour markers?**

Tumour markers are substances that can be found in the body when cancer is present. A typical tumour marker is a protein that can be found in the blood at increased levels when a certain type of cancer is present. Tumour markers are found in blood, urine, other body fluid, tumours and some tissue. They can be products of the cancer cells themselves, or made by the body in response to cancer or other conditions. Most common tumour markers are proteins, but some newer tumour markers include genes or other substances.

There are many different tumour markers. Some are seen only in a single type of cancer, while others can be found in many types of cancer.

To test for a tumour marker, the doctor most often sends a sample of the patient's blood or urine or even a piece of the tumour itself to the lab to test for tumour markers.

Tumour markers alone are rarely enough to show that cancer is present. Most tumour markers can be made by normal cells, as well as cancer cells.

### **What does 'prognosis' mean?**

Prognosis is a forecast or prediction of the probable course and outcome of a disease.

It also describes the likelihood of recovery from a disease depending on the response to treatment.

Despite a poor prognosis of cancer based on being staged as advanced, a person may react better to treatment than expected, may live longer and may even get well.

Prognosis for childhood cancers is different than for adult cancers. The main differences are the survival rate and the cause of cancer. The difference is thought to be because childhood cancer is more responsive to therapy, a child can tolerate more aggressive therapy and the prognosis is better.

The survival rate for childhood cancer is about 72%, while in adult cancers, the survival rate is 60%.

### **What is the difference between a 'benign' and a 'malignant' tumour?**

Malignant tumours have three major properties which differentiate it from benign tumours. Malignant tumours consist of cancer cells that display uncontrolled growth, which is invasive and destroys adjacent tissues, and often metastasises, where the tumour cells spread to other locations in the body via the lymphatic system or through the bloodstream.

These three 'malignant' properties of cancer differentiate malignant tumours from benign tumours.

A benign tumour, like a mole, consists mainly of non-cancerous cells which lacks the invasive property of a malignant tumour as well as the ability to spread or metastasise to other parts of the body. Depending on the location of the tumour, it may still produce negative health effects like the compression of vital organs such as blood vessels, or the over production of certain hormones.

### **Let us now look at the treatment of cancer**

A number of factors are taken into consideration before a doctor will recommend the best treatment for you. With regard to the cancer, the following will be considered: the type of cancer, the size and stage of the tumour, how fast the tumour is growing and whether it has already spread to other parts of the body or not.

Certain personal factors and those pertaining to your health will also be considered, namely age, the general condition of your health, the symptoms you present with, and whether you have other underlying conditions such as diabetes or hypertension.

The most common types of treatments for cancer are surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy or a combination of the three. Surgery and radiation therapy are mostly used to treat cancer that is confined locally while chemotherapy treat cancer that has spread beyond the local region. Radiation or chemotherapy may be given before surgery to shrink a tumour or after surgery to destroy the remaining cancer cells.

Some cancers, especially advanced cancers, are more successfully treated with radiation- and chemotherapy combined. However, if not cured, these treatments can often relieve symptoms such as pain associated with pressure or symptoms that result when the tumour infiltrates the surrounding tissues and is called palliative therapy.

Progress in cancer therapy over the past 50 years has come up with more specific targeting drugs, better combination of drugs, altered

dosages and better coordination with radiation therapy.

**Surgery** - Where affected tissue is surgically removed or cut out from the body.

**Radiotherapy** - Radiotherapy, also called radiation therapy, is the treatment of rapid-growing cancer cells with ionizing radiation.

Dividing radiation therapy in a series of doses over a prolonged period of time increases the lethal effects on the faster growing cancer cells and decreases the toxic effect on normal cells, making it possible for the normal cells to repair themselves and function properly. Radiotherapy may be used to treat localised solid tumours, such as cancers of the skin, tongue, larynx, brain, breast, or uterine cervix. It can also be used to treat leukaemia and lymphoma, that is cancer of the blood-forming cells and lymphatic system, respectively.

Ionizing radiation mostly destroys rapid-dividing or fast growing cells in the area being treated by damaging their genetic material, making it impossible for these cells to continue to grow.

Side-effects experienced from radiotherapy will depend on the area being treated. For example, if you receive radiotherapy to the neck, a sore throat and discomfort when swallowing. Complications of radiotherapy depend on the irradiated volume of tissue, the dose administered, and the technique employed.

The acute effects are usually mild and transient and may include:

- **Pain when passing urine** - associated with irradiation of the abdomen
- **Diarrhoea** - associated with stomach and pelvis therapy
- **Dermatitis** - inflammation of the skin over the irradiated area
- **Dry eyes, dry mouth, hair loss, and loss of taste** - associated with radiotherapy to the head and neck

- **Low blood counts with a risk of infection** - associated with therapy that affects the bone marrow
- **Weight and appetite loss** - associated with mouth or head and neck therapy
- **Mild depression, inflammation of the mucous membranes, nausea and vomiting, as well as tiredness and fatigue** - these are general side effects of radiation therapy

**Chemotherapy** - Chemotherapy is the use of powerful chemicals that can kill cells that multiply and grow too quickly, the main characteristic of cancer cells. These chemical agents act by damaging the DNA of the malignant cells and limit the reproduction of cancer cells. Since normal cells become cancerous by the breakdown of their DNA and by altering their DNA, tumour cells become unable to multiply and eventually die.

Chemotherapy can be administered by the following routes or a combination thereof.

It can be administered orally in the form of a pill or capsule. It can also be administered intravenously or into a body cavity like the urinary bladder. It can also be injected into a muscle or even into the spinal canal. Chemotherapy is mostly administered by means of intravenous infusion although oral administration of chemotherapy is becoming more general.

Under certain circumstances it may be advantageous to administer chemotherapy by means of a Venous Access Device also known as VAD. The VAD is placed in a large vein where it can remain for a long period of time. Not all patients that need chemotherapy may require the insertion of a VAD, but for those who have to have several sessions of treatment, blood tests and nutritional supplementation, the insertion of a VAD may be advantageous as it will decrease the number of skin pricks and the associated discomfort.

Because most chemotherapy drugs are strong, admission to hospital may be required for a few days. Under certain circumstances

chemotherapy may be administered on an outpatient basis. Some individuals may even receive their treatment at home. Should you be able to take your chemotherapy at home, you and those taking care of you will be carefully instructed on how to administer it safely.

Although chemotherapy is designed to treat cancer cells, unfortunately, it often affects parts of your body not directly affected by the cancer itself. This undesired result is referred to as a complication of treatment, or a side effect.

Scientists have made a great deal of progress in developing therapies to help manage the side effects of chemotherapy. Newer cancer treatments and supportive care treatments have led to vast improvements in the management of side effects associated with cancer treatment. There is no way to tell which side effects you may experience. You are unlikely to experience all the mentioned side effects.

How regularly chemotherapy is administered, will depend on the type of cancer, the chemotherapy drugs or combination thereof.

Chemotherapy is usually administered in cycles with rest periods in between. A cycle may last one or more days. A cycle of treatments may be administered every 1 to 4 weeks. A whole course of treatment may comprise several cycles. Each course of chemotherapy is different, but usually comprises 4 to 6 cycles.

The actual administration of some chemotherapeutic drugs may last a few seconds or minutes, while the administration of others may continue for several hours.

Side effects may be short term or acute, chronic also known as long term, or permanent. Side effects may cause inconvenience or discomfort. Additionally, certain side effects may prevent doctors from delivering the prescribed dose of chemotherapy at the specific time and schedule of the treatment plan.

Side effects from chemotherapy can include pain, diarrhoea, constipation, mouth sores, hair loss, nausea, vomiting, and blood-related side effects.

Although chemotherapy is designed for treating cancer cells, it may also affect other parts of the body not related to the original cancer. This side effect is known as a complication of treatment. Scientists have made great strides in the development of therapy to counteract side effects of chemotherapy.

Side effects will be discussed more fully at a later stage.

### **How will a doctor determine that treatment is effective?**

There are various ways in which a doctor can determine whether a patient is reacting positively to treatment. Certain tests such as blood tests, scans and X-rays are conducted before and after treatment. By comparing these results, the doctor can determine its effectiveness.

### **Why go for treatment?**

The main aim of cancer treatment is remission. Successful cancer treatment focusses not only on the primary tumour but also on tumours that may have spread to other parts of the body. Combined therapies are often used to ensure the most effective treatment of cancer with the least side effects. Even when a cure is impossible, symptoms can often be relieved with palliative therapy to improve the quality and length of life. Despite side effects, conventional treatment is scientifically based and remains best practice towards possible cure.

### **When it is said that someone is 'in remission', what does this mean?**

There are two classifications of remission - complete and partial remission. Remission is a period of time when the cancer is responding to treatment or is under control. In a complete remission, all the signs and symptoms of the disease disappear and cancer cells cannot be

detected by any of the tests available for that cancer.

It is also possible to have a partial remission. This is when the cancer shrinks but does not completely disappear with a noticeable decrease of cancer cells.

During the period of remission, the possibility of return is higher if disease activity remains. A cancer that has recurred (come back) may respond to a different type of treatment, such as a different drug combination or radiation versus surgery.

### **Complications and side effects of chemotherapy**

When you hear the words "you have cancer", you may be shocked and find it difficult to cope. When you commence with chemotherapy, it may even be more difficult to deal with the disease because of the side effects and complications associated with the treatment. It is therefore important to be prepared on the possible side effects that may be experienced to determine beforehand how to deal with it.

Contact the nearest CANSA Care Centre in this regard or phone CANSA on its toll free number by dialling 0800 22 66 22. You can also share fears and anxieties on CANSA's website at [www.cansa.org.za](http://www.cansa.org.za) where a clinical specialist will respond within 48 hours.

### **How to cope with possible hair loss**

Individuals react differently to the different types of cancer treatment. Not everyone receiving cancer treatment will experience hair loss. Specific chemotherapy drugs may cause temporary damage to the hair follicles because they are fast growing cells.

Hair may thin only, fall out in clumps, or you may become completely bald. The good news is that hair will always grow back after completion of chemotherapy. During the period of hair loss, one may opt to wear a wig, a scarf, a hat or a cap, according to personal preference. When your hair grows back, it may

temporarily be of a different texture and/or colour. Contact your nearest CANSA Care Centre to assist with the purchase or hiring of an affordable wig.

### **What to do about nausea and vomiting, diarrhoea and constipation?**

Chemotherapy acts on the whole body and all its systems. It also affects normal cells, especially the mucous membranes which may result in nausea, diarrhoea or constipation. There are anti-nausea medications available that is given before treatment. These medicines should be taken regularly, as prescribed by your doctor, to be effective.

If certain medicines do not work, the doctor or health professional should be able to give you an alternative. One may experience nausea with or without vomiting. Nausea and/or vomiting can occur on the day you get your treatment and may last for a few days - depending on the drugs received.

Diarrhoea is a general side effect among individuals who receive cancer treatment. The diarrhoea may even be caused by the cancer. Diarrhoea may, however, be more uncomfortable for individuals with cancer. It may also be a sign or symptom of a more serious kind.

### **What causes diarrhoea in individuals with cancer?**

Everyone experiences diarrhoea occasionally. If you have cancer, the ordinary causes of diarrhoea may still affect you. Cancer can be a contributing cause of diarrhoea.

### **Chemotherapy and radiation therapy**

Chemo- and radiation therapy does not only kill cancer cells, it also affects and kills rapid growing cells such as the lining of the gut.

Damage to the lining of the gut may result in diarrhoea. Not all chemotherapeutic drugs cause diarrhoea. Ask the doctor about specific treatment.

### **Surgery**

If parts of the intestines have been removed to treat the cancer, the ability of the intestines to absorb fats may be affected and this may lead to the development of diarrhoea.

### **Bone marrow and stem cell transplant**

Both chemo- and radiation therapy that follow on bone marrow or stem cell transplants may cause diarrhoea. It may also be a complication of graft-versus-host illness if the body rejects the received bone marrow or stem cells.

### **Infections**

Cancer treatment may make one more prone to infections which may be a cause of diarrhoea. An additional factor may also be the effect of antibiotics which may be administered to treat any possible infection.

### **Stress and anxiety**

Severe stress or anxiety may also cause diarrhoea.

### **Cancer itself**

Certain cancers may be the cause of diarrhoea; health professionals will provide information in this regard.

A tumour may also be the cause of constipation.

Should a tumour cause pressure on a spinal nerve, it may result in the decrease in activity of the intestines which may result in constipation. Tumours in the abdomen may also compress the intestines causing narrowing which may also result in constipation.

### **Causes of mouth sores in cancer patients**

Even before the commencement of cancer treatment one should be aware of the fact that certain cancer treatments may cause mouth sores. Mouth sores can be very painful and cause discomfort and distress. This may vary from mere discomfort to extreme complications.

Mouth sores related to cancer treatment appear on the inside of the mouth or lips. It is like burns and can be extremely painful. This may make it very difficult to eat, speak, swallow or to breathe. The sores may appear on any part of the lips, mouth, gums, tongue, roof of the mouth or floor of the mouth. The sores may even spread to the oesophagus.

Chemo- and radiation therapy to the head and neck can be the cause of mouth sores.

### **Nausea and vomiting during cancer treatment**

Nausea is an uncomfortable feeling in the back of the throat or stomach which may result in vomiting. Although treatment for nausea has improved, nausea and vomiting remain serious side effects of cancer therapy. Continued nausea maybe more depressing to some patients than vomiting.

It is important to prevent nausea and vomiting in cancer patients. Uncontrolled nausea and vomiting may be a hindrance in the treatment and care because it may lead to an electrolyte imbalance, loss of appetite, physical and spiritual problems, a ruptured oesophagus, fractures of the ribs and the opening up of surgical wounds.

### **Acute nausea and vomiting**

It usually presents within 24 hours of commencement of chemotherapy and may last for a few days.

### **Anticipated nausea and vomiting**

Anticipated nausea and vomiting may be experienced following the third or fourth chemotherapy cycle. The smell, sight and sounds of the treatment rooms may remind the person of previous episodes and may result in nausea and vomiting even before a new cycle of chemo- or radiation therapy has commenced.

### **Chronic nausea and vomiting**

This may affect individuals with advanced cancer.

### **Is breastfeeding feasible while receiving chemotherapy?**

The answer is an emphatic **“no”**! Some drugs will be transmitted to the baby through the breast milk. Consult a health professional in this regard.

### **Taking other medicines while receiving chemotherapy**

Always consult a health professional before taking any medicines that were not prescribed by a doctor. Certain medicines may lessen the effectiveness of chemotherapy or cause side effects because of interaction with the chemotherapy drugs. This includes laxatives, flu medications, painkillers, contraceptives and mineral and vitamin supplements.

### **What about complementary or alternative treatments while receiving chemotherapy?**

Refrain from any complementary or alternative treatments without having discussed it with a doctor as it may negatively affect treatment.

### **Does chemotherapy affect sexual functioning?**

Chemotherapy may affect sexual functioning in both men and women. It is important to discuss this with a doctor even before undergoing treatment. Any resulting negative sexual functioning may adversely affect your relationship between partners and should be discussed. Changes experienced may include feelings of rejection, loss of libido, changes in body image and sterility. It is advisable for women not to fall pregnant during treatment as some of the drugs may cause birth defects. Depending on age, both males and females could enquire about sperm and ova banking prior to treatment if they are still considering having children afterwards.

### **What is a clinical trial?**

Clinical trials refer to newly developed chemotherapy drugs that are still undergoing research for efficacy and safety. When you do not respond to existing treatment protocols, ask your doctor about the possible availability of clinical trials. If all other treatment fails, the

person may be selected to participate on a voluntary basis in an appropriate existing clinical trial.

### **Let us look at the possible causes of cancer**

There is no one single cause for cancer. Scientists believe that it is the interaction of many factors together that produce cancer. The factors involved may be genetic, environmental or physical characteristics of the individual.

Genetic causes of cancer are more common amongst children. Childhood cancers often occur or begin in the stem cells, which are simple cells capable of producing other types of specialised cells that the body needs. A sporadic cell change or mutation is usually what causes childhood cancer.

People with a chromosomal abnormality also have an increased risk of cancer for example people with Down's Syndrome have a higher risk of developing acute leukaemia. Family history may also play a role. Some breast and ovarian cancers are linked to a specific gene mutation which is more common in some ethnic groups and families. A woman's risk of developing breast cancer increases up to three times if her mother or sister also had breast cancer.

In adults, the types of cells that become cancerous are usually 'epithelial' cells, which are cells that line the body cavity and cover the body surface. Cancer in adults mostly occurs from environmental exposure to these cells over time. Adult cancers are sometimes referred to as 'acquired' for this reason.

### **Risk factors associated with cancer**

A risk factor does not necessarily cause the disease but it may make the body less resistant to it. The following risk factors and mechanisms have been proposed as contributing to cancer:

- Lifestyle factors such as tobacco smoking, high-fat diets, physical inactivity, excessive intake of alcohol, as well as obesity. Although these factors are generally associated with adult cancers, it may also affect children if

exposed to these lifestyle factors over time.

- Exposure to biological carcinogens, such as infections from certain bacteria, parasites or viruses. Certain viruses such as the Epstein-Barr Virus (EBV) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), the virus which causes Acquired Immune Deficiency, or AIDS), have been linked to an increased risk of developing certain cancers such as Hodgkin's and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.
- Radiation causing agents (carcinogens) such as ultraviolet (UV) rays through excessive sun, sunbed exposure and ionising radiation for example uranium. In 2011 IARC - International Agency for Research on Cancer - declared non-ionising radiation (also known as electromagnetic radiation) from cell phones and other sources, a further probable cause of cancer. Children over-exposed to UV rays before the age of 18 have an increased risk of skin cancer in adulthood.
- Environmental and chemical carcinogen exposure, such as asbestos, aflatoxin (a food contaminant), arsenic, pesticides and fertilisers have been linked to cancer.
- Man-made molecules such as Bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates found in certain plastics have been found to be hormone disruptors and directly linked to hormonal cancers.
- Some forms of high-dose chemo- and radiation therapy have been linked to cancer. In some cases, individuals (mostly children) that have been exposed to these agents may develop a second primary malignancy later in life. These strong anti-cancer agents can alter cells and/or the immune system. A second primary malignancy is a cancer that appears as a result from treatment of a different cancer.

Ageing is another fundamental factor for the development of cancer. The incidence of cancer rises dramatically with age, most likely due to a build-up of risks for specific cancers that increase with age. The overall risk increases because of the tendency for cell repair to be less effective as a person grows older.



### **How to improve quality of life?**

Although there may be some unpleasant side effects, many people manage to lead a normal life while undergoing treatment. It is important to prevent infection while on chemotherapy as it may negatively affect your treatment. Avoid close contact with people who are ill. If you experience times when you feel too ill to socialise, accept it, be gentle with yourself and rest as much as you need to.

It is normal to feel anxious and to experience fear of the unknown. Ask questions from health professionals and obtain the needed knowledge about your condition.

When feeling worried or discouraged, talk openly and meaningfully about this to loved ones or a support group. Find out about possible support groups in the area by contacting the nearest CANSA Care Centre.

Take time for introspection and try to understand what you are going through. CANSA has many facilities throughout all nine provinces that can provide support.

CANSA programmes include:

- Individual counselling
- Support groups
- Care Homes that provide accommodation and transport for out-of-town patients whilst undergoing treatment
- Stoma care
- Lymphoedema treatment
- Loan of medical equipment and devices, for example wheelchairs and wigs

Please contact CANSA on the toll free number 0800 22 66 22 for assistance and further information.

## **Chapter 3 - Coping with the Emotional Impact of Cancer and the Importance of Communication**

### **Welcome to chapter 3 of the CancerCare Coping Kit**

In this chapter we examine the emotional impact following the diagnosis of cancer and how it may affect you and your relationship with others. Some find it difficult to talk to loved ones, friends or doctors. To understand the emotions involved, it is important to recognise that different emotions may occur at different times for different people. Cancer is a life-changing event. For you, as the diagnosed person, as well as for all the people close to you, it affects all aspects of your being, including the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual spheres, as well as the family's social and financial structures.

Your cancer journey is unique. It cannot be compared to anyone else's. You and your loved ones may experience reactions and needs that differ from each other. Research shows that those who seek support, individually or within groups cope better. Your past experience in dealing with crises determines how you react to and cope with cancer. If you dealt passively with situations in the past, you may find yourself reacting in the same way. This could hamper your ability to cope well. People with a proactive approach will find a sense of control. After the initial avoidance behaviour, they take responsibility for what happens in their lives.

### **What emotions can be expected following a diagnosis of cancer and how to deal with them?**

When hearing the words "you have cancer", one will feel a whirlwind of emotions. These emotions often follow a common pattern. It is therefore important to deal with the different emotions as they occur. In the event of feeling being caught up in an emotion, it may have psychological effects which may even slow down the healing process.

**Shock and disbelief** are often the first emotions that are felt. "Surely this is NOT HAPPENING TO ME!" Many individuals see this as a death sentence. This is not necessarily true as the disease can be managed and treated most of the time. Disbelief about what is happening to us is understandable and it serves a useful purpose. It provides a numbing effect that softens the news of the diagnosis. This provides a chance to adjust to major changes in life.

When in shock, one is unable to concentrate or to take in all the relevant facts and information. Don't overreact but assure yourself of the facts. Let the doctor repeat the information with someone else present. Give yourself time to adjust to the diagnosis. Shock is natural under these circumstances and one should not be too hard or demanding on oneself.

**Uncertainty** is created in one's life. Instead of seeing cancer as something to die from, it can be viewed as something to learn to live with. Dealing positively with cancer allows one to make plans for the future while living in the present.

**Guilt** is another key emotion to deal with. Often people blame themselves for their illness and think that they have caused their own cancer. Some people mistakenly think that they are being punished for things they have said or done and see themselves as having failed. They say: "I did everything right, why did I still get sick?". It must be emphasised that cancer is complicated and cannot necessarily be attributed to one single cause.

In dealing with guilt, look at unresolved issues; identify the feelings behind the guilt, such as remorse, anger or sadness. When feeling guilty, a person may actually be feeling regret for not being able to do what has to be done. Do not give into self blame for the impact of what cancer is having on loved ones. There should not be any blame.

Cancer may affect anyone. Guilt may be lessened by talking to others or contact the nearest CANSA Care Centre for support.

**Fear** of the future and what may lie ahead is very normal and must be expected. Questions often raised include: Will I live? How will this disease impact my career? How will I manage my responsibilities as a breadwinner / wife / husband / partner/ parent/ employee / student?

Fear is often difficult to deal with. Remember, the more one knows, the less the fear. It is natural to be afraid of the unknown. By acknowledging one's own fear and sharing it with someone, the fears will become more manageable.

### **What are some of the most common fears to cope with?**

**Fear of the unknown** - Unsure of whether one is going to die may cause withdrawal from loved ones or others. Family and friends may stay away because of their own fears causing them to withdraw to protect themselves. This often results in isolation which can contribute to depression.

**Fear of disfigurement** is often experienced and may be associated with complications of treatment, for example a mastectomy, loss of hair, or an amputation. One may no longer feel complete and withdraw from life, resulting in loss of self esteem and confidence. This can lead to depression, as more permanent disfigurement is difficult to face. It takes time and a real effort to come to terms with one's new body.

Even though there may be a feeling of not coping with changes, reach out for assistance and support. Face these fears through sharing your feelings with your loved ones or a close friend. Support groups and counselling will also be beneficial. Call the nearest CANSA Care Centre and accept the assistance.

**Fear of death** - even if the prognosis is good, death now becomes more real than ever before. Coming face to face with mortality can

be frightening. Having a strong spiritual belief will be of assistance during this time. Individuals, who are not religious, should accept the prayers and thoughts of others.

**Fear of losing independence** - Some may feel that they are losing control of their lives as a doctor is in control of the treatment while cancer is in control of the body. One may even feel worse when having to rely more on loved ones once treatment is commenced with. It is not easy to have to rely on others.

**Fear of pain** - Some types of cancer do not cause pain. Should pain occur, it can be managed effectively. Knowledge and information about the pain and side effects cancer may cause, will alleviate this fear. Talk to a medical doctor or health professional as they are knowledgeable and will be able to provide help.

**Loss of income** may become an immediate reality. Some may find that they cannot continue to work because of the disease. Fear of loss of income is especially a reality for an individual who is a breadwinner or a single parent.

Dependency on a medical team is acceptable up to a point. One must, however, empower oneself to be involved in the treatment options and all those decisions that have a direct impact. Do not give up control over your life and your situation. Stand up for yourself and your needs.

Ask questions and get answers. You must always feel that you are in control. It is your life and you must live it.

### **What other emotions can be expected?**

It is common to move from feeling strong and in control into sadness and short term depression at this time.

Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross pioneered methods in the support and counselling of personal trauma, grief and grieving. She also dramatically improved our understanding in relation to bereavement and care. She makes it clear that trauma and emotional shock are

relative in terms of effect on people as each person is a unique individual.

**Denial** is a conscious or unconscious refusal to accept the facts, information and reality relating to the situation at hand. It refers to the inability to believe or acknowledge that one is being diagnosed with cancer. This is often expressed as: "No! It can't be true". It is a perfectly natural defence mechanism. Some people can become locked in this stage when dealing with a traumatic change. Denial functions as a buffer allowing time to accept the current situation. If it goes on for too long, there will be a delay facing up to the reality and it could cause delay or postpone that which could affect the outcome of treatment.

Accept that denial is a normal reaction to a cancer diagnosis. Make allowance for mood fluctuations that swing from hope to despair. It takes time for the reality to sink in. Lack of communication at this time reinforces feelings of isolation. It can cause breakdown in family relationships. Open communication and support between family and friends is necessary.

**Anger** can manifest in many different ways. Many times it is said: "How dare this happen? I won't allow it! It isn't fair! Why now? I don't deserve this". Anger is a reaction to the unfairness of what has happened and the unjust loss of lifestyle. Anger can be directed at the cancer, at God, at the medical profession, at friends, or at a loved one. It often happens that people dealing with emotional upset are angry with themselves, and/or others, especially to those close to them.

When handling anger, it is important to identify why there is anger and then to address the anger. Yell, scream, and punch pillows to release the anger. Don't wallow in the feeling, use that energy to get well and live positively. Avoid frustrating situations and allow time to cry when there is need to. Do not mask true feelings through jest. Rather clarify the feelings and discuss them openly with someone that can be trusted.

Anger may often mask other feelings like fear, panic or helplessness. It is easier to express than to admit “I cannot cope”. Expressed anger is healthy if it allows proactive thinking and motivates you to action.

**Bargaining** is traditionally the stage where people facing emotional stress, attempt to bargain with God as the being in control of life. People facing trauma, grief, and even disbelief may bargain or seek to negotiate a compromise to maintain life in accordance with their beliefs. For example: “Please don’t let this be true! I will never again do the things I did in the past if my situation can be changed”. Bargaining, however, rarely provides a sustainable solution.

**Depression** is often the dress rehearsal or the practice run for the ‘aftermath’ although this stage means different things for different people. It is natural to feel sadness and regret, fear and uncertainty. It shows that the person has at least begun to accept reality. During this stage the person begins to understand the certainty of the situation. The individual may become silent, refuse visitors and spend more time crying and grieving. The process allows the person to disconnect from loved ones and objects of affection. It is an important time for grieving or for loss to be processed.

Relaxation exercises, talking about feelings, changing negative thoughts, acknowledging grief and loss can help one deal with depression. Prayer and meditation can lessen feelings of anguish and sadness.

**Acceptance** is a stage that definitely varies according to the person’s situation, although broadly it is an indication that there is some emotional detachment and objectivity. It is described as the final stage by Dr Kübler-Ross. It is a sign that the individual has worked through all that is important and that a decision has been taken to accept the diagnosis and that a person is prepared to fight the cancer and there is an indication for a reason to live and to be a cancer survivor.

With acceptance comes the opportunity to get the most out of each day and to build a bridge of hope.

### **How to reach acceptance**

Working through all the mentioned emotions will help accept the situation. This will increase a feeling of being more hopeful, less resigned and despairing. This allows for a focus on future life goals and to be realistic about progress and plans.

### **When should medical and other help be sought?**

It is important to find someone who is trustworthy to talk to. This could be a close relative, friend, counsellor or CANSA staff member or volunteer. Talk to them about existing fears, needs and things that may trouble. This will help you to gain insight and acceptance.

You should seek help if the following symptoms continue for longer than 6 to 8 weeks:

- When you lose interest in things that used to give you pleasure
- When you sleep too much or too little
- When you lose your appetite
- When you feel constantly tired
- When you lose the ability to think clearly or concentrate
- When you feel guilty or worthless
- Long term depression may lead to feelings of worthlessness and even suicide that needs to be addressed

### **Anything about emotions that need to be known**

True feelings are never right or wrong, but need to be expressed in a constructive manner.

All the emotions mentioned are normal after a cancer diagnosis and are to be expected. Any emotion that disrupts ordinary life and causes dysfunctional behaviour is cause for worry.

For example: instead of dealing with their anger, some people may lash out at those closest to them and further isolate themselves. The weeks and months following a cancer

diagnosis can be a roller coaster ride for everyone involved. One person may be feeling OK while another may be in denial. Honest and open communication about the issues and feelings is important to prevent misunderstanding and resolve possible conflict.

### **The importance of communication**

There may be a need to give 'voice' to the feelings that may be experienced. Feel comfortable saying the words that need to be said. Sometimes the most difficult communication is with those we love the most. For family and friends to understand what their loved one is going through, good communication skills will be a requirement. Words people use can cause misunderstanding and hurt. Communication style learnt in childhood might either enhance or inhibit one's ability to make one understood. Cancer should not be used to get sympathy or to control others.

### **What is good communication?**

Good communication has two sides. Tell people how you feel so that they understand you. Listen as the other person expresses how they are feeling. You may think that others understand you but perhaps they don't. Good communication doesn't always solve problems but it can make them easier to manage.

### **Effective communication**

Let us discuss five skills that will enable you to express yourself clearly:

- The first skill is to be assertive, showing that what you are saying is important to you. When it comes to your health there is no such thing as a silly question. You need to be involved in your treatment decisions.
- The second skill is using "I" messages, such as "I feel", "I am" or "I think" rather than making statements such as "you should". This is an open and direct way of stating your views and taking responsibility for your feelings without being confrontational.
- The third skill is to listen to someone carefully. Show them that you are listening.

Clarify with them that you have understood their message. Ask them "What I hear you saying is .....". Ask for confirmation or let the other person clarify what they have meant to say.

- The fourth skill is to match words and gestures. We also communicate without words. Make sure that your body language matches what you say. Non-verbal expressions can send a different message than your words. Smiling when you tell someone that you are in pain, could be confusing to the recipient.
- The last skill is expressing your feelings as well as your thoughts. Communicating both feelings and thoughts will allow others to understand and help you constructively. Suppressing feelings such as anger and fear cause unnecessary stress. Find a trustworthy person to talk to. Someone who can both understand and relate to what you are saying. Join a support group to express yourself. They allow you to connect with people who are going through a similar experience. CANSA Care Centres can provide more information on the available support groups in your area.

### **How to improve communication with a medical team?**

In chapter 1 we covered a number of medical terms.

Become familiar with medical terminology. Ask your doctor to explain the words you don't understand. Write down all your questions before your doctor's appointment. Have a family member or friend go with you to act as a second pair of ears. Proactive participation in your treatment means understanding and discussing your illness and treatment with your doctor. Don't be afraid that you will waste your doctor's time by asking questions.

Some doctors are not good communicators and may appear blunt or seemingly uncaring

Establish an open channel of conversation with your doctor that will allow you to be informed

and empowered. The more informed you are, the less you will be influenced by myths, unrealistic promises or the bad experiences of others. Learning about your treatment will help you to manage side effects and physical aspects.

Effective communication is a crucial part of learning to live with cancer.

Remember this is all about your life and your health. By using these communication skills you will develop a good relationship with your medical team and other health professionals.

### **What rights do you have relating to your illness?**

Living with cancer, you have the right to make your own choices without interference from others. After careful consideration and in consultation with health professionals, you have the right to make your own decisions regarding the following:

- The type and extent of treatment
- A second medical opinion
- Refusal of continued treatment
- As much or little information as is necessary
- Confidentiality and privacy
- Counselling and support

It is important that you know and understand your rights.

### **How will cancer impact on your family?**

For family members your cancer journey is also theirs. It is as difficult for them as for you. While you actively fight the cancer they feel helpless as they can only observe. Talk to them about your true feelings and allow them to do so as well. They also need time to adjust to the situation and learn how to listen and become more supportive towards you.

Pre-existing problems in a family can be made worse by the diagnosis of cancer. Uncertainties and concerns about the disease may cause uncertainty. Normal family relations may become disrupted. Family members may be unsure of how to react to a loved one diagnosed with cancer and may need guidance

on how to cope. A social worker or counsellor as well as a support group can provide the needed assistance. Learning to speak one's mind will help others to understand needs and feelings. For example: you may be exhausted and overwhelmed following treatment like radiation and chemotherapy. Sharing this information with your family will help them understand and know what to expect and how to become more supportive.

Family members may feel frightened about the current situation and for not knowing what the future holds. They may even fear the new responsibilities they now have to face as their family roles might have to change. Fathers may suddenly find themselves doing chores or preparing dinner while wives have to become the breadwinner. These changes are likely to disrupt family life.

### **How can you as a family deal with these changes?**

Sharing your fears and anxieties will help everyone to cope with the uncertainty of the future, and will allow all of you to live more meaningfully in the present.

The family unit has great strength when the needs of each person are taken into account and respected. Help from friends may also make a difference. Allow them to run chores, cook and even do housework. This will reduce the strain on the family.

### **How will friends and co-workers behave?**

Cancer not only changes the cancer survivor, but also those around that person. People behave in ways one may not expect. Some friends disappear and others hang around too much. To identify and deal with the various types of behaviours, we will describe some common reactions that can result.

**Know-it-alls** - These people are convinced that they know what is best. They inundate with advice, books and information. They are convinced that their advice will ensure a cure. They are usually well-meaning and concerned. This makes them difficult to ignore even if their

advice is impractical. For example, insisting on a positive attitude when you are feeling really ill may be disempowering, especially if they imply that not enough effort is being made. Be assertive in responding to them. Don't allow any 'brow beating'.

**Misinformed** people have a tendency to make silly comments that are thoughtless and tactless. They don't understand the situation and are not interested in you. Concerned only with themselves, they want to be made to feel better. For example, by being cheerful even when you are not, these people may exhaust you and need to be avoided.

**Faders** disappear when they are faced by a diagnosis of cancer. They blame their absence on you or your illness, using excuses like "I knew you would be tired". Some faders are physically present but emotionally and mentally absent. These are usually close family members and may even behave as if you are invisible. Faders may stay away as they are afraid of their feelings and their own mortality. It is important that you address their behaviour in an honest and constructive way to allow them to understand and adjust their own behaviour.

**Helpers** seem to know where and how to help. They treat you in the same way they always did. They listen when you need to talk and know that just by being there they are making a difference. Helpers don't wait to be asked. They offer help where they think it is needed. Some people need to adjust to the situation to become helpers even if it may be awkward for them at first. Be open and share your feelings with these people and tell them that you appreciate them and would like to have them around.

### **Can self-help make a difference?**

Cancer is a great challenge and requires tenacity and resourcefulness. Acknowledge your feelings and emotions and take control of your life and deal with areas of concern as a priority. Developing constructive attitudes and behaviour patterns will aid you in living

positively with cancer. Acknowledge the issues that you have control over and deal with them as a priority.

What you can do to be in control

- Seek knowledge and ask questions
- Participate in making treatment decisions
- Improve your communication skills
- Learn to express your thoughts and emotions in an appropriate way
- Set goals on all levels of your life
- Keep a journal which puts you in touch with what is happening in your daily life
- Learn to ask for, and accept, help
- Learn new skills like relaxation and visualisation
- Consider counselling if you have difficulty in coping
- Develop your acceptance of what is happening
- Be in touch with your own needs
- Cultivate a moderate healthy lifestyle
- Reduce stress through physical activity and relaxation exercises
- Rely on your faith and spirituality to comfort and support you
- Deal with, and change, negative thoughts and behaviours such as isolating yourself, blaming others, being a martyr and blaming God
- Join one of CANSA's support groups in your area.

### **To conclude**

Develop a solution-oriented approach that solves problems. Keep the word **COPE** strongly in your mind, as each letter of the word stands for an important part of learning to live with cancer.

**C** is for **CONTROL** - take control of what you can.

**O** is for **OPEN COMMUNICATION** - open communication with family, friends and your medical team

**P** is for **POSITIVE** - develop positive coping skills

**E** is for **EXPERT** - learn to seek expert advice and support to help you make informed decisions

Being healthy is more than just being disease free. It is a healthy balance of the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual self.

## **Chapter 4 - Nutrition Guidelines and Coping with Associated Complications**

Welcome to chapter 4 of the CancerCare Coping Kit where we discuss nutrition.

### **Why is it so important to eat correctly?**

It is especially important during any illness to maintain a healthy diet as the body requires nutrients to fight disease and counteract the side effects of treatment.

The side effects of treatments, emotional factors like anxiety and stress can play a role in altered taste, lack of appetite, digestive problems and general loss of interest in food.

Surgery on or around the digestive tract often inhibit the functioning of the mouth, throat and stomach. These areas may become painful and digestion may slow down.

Both chemo- and radiotherapy can cause sores in the mouth, nausea, vomiting, changes in taste and appetite, diarrhoea and constipation. These symptoms may affect the ability to eat and the body's ability to absorb nutrients from food.

### **How to eat correctly?**

A correct diet provides all the fats, protein and carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, fibre and water for the body to function adequately. Each of these nutrients fulfils a specific function in the body. Without the needed nutrients, the body may not be able to protect, repair, replace or cleanse itself.

### **If fats are important why do people talk about bad fats?**

As not all fats are bad for the body, it should not be excluded entirely. Fats are important, as it provides energy, contributes vitamins A, D, E

and K and essential fatty acids to the diet. Fat cells also insulate the body from cold and help to protect internal organs from injury. Depending on the binding structure of fats, it can either be called saturated fat that is mostly found in animal products, or unsaturated fat which is plant based.

Unsaturated fats, generally found in liquid form at room temperature, are known as good fats that increase the good cholesterol, namely high-density lipoprotein or HDL in the bloodstream. Unsaturated fats further decrease bad cholesterol, namely low-density lipoprotein or called LDL in the bloodstream.

Saturated fats function in directly the opposite way as unsaturated fats. Mostly solid at room temperature, saturated fats decreases the good cholesterol or HDL in the body and increases the bad cholesterol or LDL in the body or that can lead to long term cardiovascular problems and obesity.

### **Let me tell you more about the two unsaturated fats**

Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats are needed by the skin, nervous system, immune system and circulatory system and is necessary to keep the membranes healthy. A dry skin may develop when the body is in need of unsaturated fats.

Omega-3, 6 and 9 are all important major unsaturated fatty acids. A good balance of all three is needed for good health.

Omega-3 is most probably the most important of the three as it assists in boosting the immune system and keeps the cardiovascular system healthy. It further offers anti-cancer benefits by counteracting inflammation which is also the cause of many degenerative diseases. Omega-3 does so by counteracting the pro-inflammatory effects of Omega-6.

As our bodies cannot produce Omega-3, it needs to be ingested in the form of fatty fish, flax seed- and canola oil, legumes, green leafy vegetables, and cherries. Eat oily fish, such as



pilchards, salmon, mackerel, snoek, trout and sardines frequently, but in moderation, as it contains a lot of salt.

### **Why you need to restrict saturated- as well as trans fats**

Saturated fats are mostly found in animal fat. Foods high in saturated fats are foods such as fatty meats, chicken with skin, smoked and preserved processed meats like polony, bacon, ham, cold meats, and sausages. Full cream dairy products also contain large amounts of animal fat.

Trans fats, also known as hydrogenated fats, have been processed and damaged by heat. Hidden in many foods, it degrades the cell membranes, disabling cells to absorb nutrients. Foods to avoid are fried foods, biscuits, croissants, chips, cakes, pancake mixes, doughnuts, and pastries. Check the label of products for the words 'hydrogenated fats' as these are trans fats that should be avoided.

Minimise the intake of both saturated fat and trans fat by checking the food labels. All packaged foods should have a food label that provides information on the content and composition. The amount of trans fats per serving of food will appear under the 'Total Fat' section of the label. Legislation introduced in 2010 restricts trans fat contents to 2% - that is 2 grams per 100ml in all foodstuffs.

For those labels that do not list the amount of trans fat, add up the values for saturated, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. If the number is less than the 'Total Fats' shown on the label, the unaccounted figure represents the trans fat.

### **Watch out for hidden fats**

Be cautious of 'hidden fats' such as fried foods, pies, samosas, doughnuts, rotis, mayonnaise and ice cream. Also avoid foods with flour and crumb coatings as it absorbs a lot of fat. Use low-fat or skimmed milk rather than coffee creamers or tea whiteners. Limit your intake of deep fried foods, poultry skin, full-fat dairy products and cheeses, fast foods, and fatty

bakery items. Snack foods such as chocolates and crisps also contain saturated fats.

### **Are all proteins good for you?**

Proteins are the building blocks of the body. Without a good supply the body is unable to function, repair or replace damaged tissue properly. Every cell in the human body contains protein. It is a major part of the skin, muscles, organs, and glands. Protein is also found in all body fluids, except bile and urine. Two servings of protein should be eaten per day, if not possible; speak with a health professional to suggest a protein supplement drink. CANSA's Stoma Clinics provide some of these supplements at low cost.

### **Protein-containing foods are grouped as either complete or incomplete proteins**

Complete proteins contain all nine essential amino acids and is found in animal foods such as meat, fish, poultry, eggs, milk, and milk products like yogurt and cheese. Soybeans are the only plant protein considered to be a complete protein.

Incomplete proteins lack one or more of the essential amino acids. Sources include beans, peas, nuts, seeds, and grain. A small amount of incomplete protein is also found in vegetables.

### **If correctly combined, plant proteins can provide essential amino acids**

Plant proteins can be combined to provide all of the essential amino acids and form a complete protein. Examples of combined complete plant proteins are rice and beans, wheat cereal, mealies and beans. Consider using plant proteins such as soybean products as well as complete plant protein combinations more often as these are both healthy and cost effective.

### **Let us discuss the importance of carbohydrates or starch in the diet**

Carbohydrates are the prime source of energy for all cells in the body needed for physical activity and organ function. The best sources of carbohydrates are fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, by providing essential vitamins and

minerals, fibre, and a host of important phytonutrients to the body. There are two types of carbohydrates, namely: fast releasing and slow releasing carbohydrates.

Fast releasing carbohydrates include products such as sugar, honey, sweets, white bread and mealie or maize meal, while slow releasing carbohydrates include vegetables, whole grains, brown rice, oats, legumes and fresh fruit. Energy levels are sustained throughout the day by limiting the intake of fast releasing carbohydrates and by eating small, regular meals of slow releasing carbohydrates.

Make carbohydrates high in roughage and wholegrain the basis of most meals. Carbohydrates, such as coarse mealie meal, samp, brown rice and whole wheat bread, pasta, potatoes, mealies on the cob and sweet potatoes should be considered as staple foods in the diet. It is important to eat wholegrain bread or cereals for breakfast as it sustains energy levels during the day. Look out for the CANSA Smart Choice logo on food labels.

It is beneficial to eat five servings of vegetables and fruit per day. It is best to eat fruit and vegetables fresh and raw if possible, as it plays an important role in the prevention of cancer.

Use sugar and sugar containing drinks and food in moderation, as it promotes inflammatory processes in the body which are linked to cancer.

To keep blood-sugar at constant and safe levels, insulin further promotes the storage of fat. So with the intake of a lot of sugar, you are making way for rapid weight gain and elevated triglyceride levels. Both of these conditions have also been linked to cardiovascular disease.

### **The importance of fortified carbohydrates**

Since 2003 all mealie meal, as well as white and brown bread flour must be fortified with vitamins and minerals or micronutrients as determined by legislation. Look out for South African fortified mealie meal which contains,

Vitamin C, iron, zinc, Vitamin B6 and Vitamin B12, copper, selenium, Vitamin E and riboflavin that significantly reduces anaemia, help lower body weight, boosts the immune system and helps protect against cancer.

### **Let's discuss the meaning of glycaemic index**

Glycaemic index or GI is the measure of the food's ability to elevate blood sugar. The glycaemic response is influenced by the amount of food eaten, its fibre content, the fat content of the food or amount of added fat, as well as the way the food is prepared.

High glycaemic carbohydrates are best consumed during and after exercise. It enters the bloodstream quickly and is readily available for fuelling exercising muscles.

Low glycaemic carbohydrates enter the bloodstream slowly and is best eaten before exercise. It provides sustained longer-term energy, and helps maintain stable blood sugar levels during extended exercise periods of more than one hour. Low GI carbohydrate intake like low GI bread is recommended for daily use.

### **Legumes as a carbohydrate in the diet**

Legumes such as dry beans, kidney beans, black beans, peas, chick peas, lentils and soy provide an opportunity to increase variety in economical menu planning while increasing the intake of fibre, keeping blood sugar levels steady and promoting health in general.

Most legumes contain important nutrients, carbohydrates, proteins, fibre, vitamins and minerals and are low in fat. Legumes are also tasty and a healthy substitute or extender of meat.

Legume fibres further promote healthy bowel function and prevent constipation. It also helps prevent diseases such as heart disease and reduces the risk for cancer.

### **The role of fibre in the diet**

Carbohydrates and protein fibres are not digested in the body. Fibre absorbs water and keeps bowel matter soft and easy to move. It

cleans out the bowel and removes waste before it can affect the body. Whole grains, vegetables, sump, mealie meal, mealie rice, fruits, nuts, seeds, lentils, beans and high fibre cereal are good sources of fibre.

It needs to be eaten daily to keep the bowel function regular. Whole grains are rich sources in fermentable carbohydrates.

### **The importance of vitamins in the diet?**

A well balanced diet should provide all the necessary vitamins and minerals required to maintain good health. Vitamins have important functions in almost all the processes of the body which include the immune, hormonal and nervous systems. It must be obtained from food or supplements as the body is unable to produce or manufacture vitamins. There are thirteen vitamins classified as either fat soluble, that is Vitamins A, D, E and K, and water soluble which include Vitamins C and B complex.

Fat-soluble vitamins, for example A, D and K are absorbed with fat into the circulation and is stored in the liver. Vitamin E is distributed throughout the body's fatty tissues. Good sources mainly include green leafy vegetables, vegetable oils, egg yolk and dairy products.

Excessive water-soluble vitamins, such as Vitamin C and B complex remain in the body for a brief period before being excreted by the kidneys. The one exception to this is Vitamin B12, which is stored in the liver. Water-soluble vitamins need to be taken daily. Good sources mainly include organ meats, dairy products, eggs, legumes, green vegetables and fruits, with emphasis on citrus fruits, mainly for Vitamin C. Vegetarians and vegans might need to supplement their diet with Vitamin B12. The British Vegan Society recommends soy products as an excellent source of Vitamin B12 as replacement for meats, eggs and dairy products.

### **Minerals are also important in your diet**

Minerals form important components of the teeth, bones, tissues, blood, muscle and nerve cells. It can be found in varying amounts in a

variety of foods such as meat, cereals including cereal products such as bread, fish, milk and dairy products, vegetables, fruit especially dried fruit and nuts.

Minerals are grouped under 2 categories, namely macro minerals and trace minerals. Macro minerals include calcium, sodium, phosphorous and potassium. Edible bones in pilchards and sardines are good sources of calcium and needed for blood clotting, bone health and wound healing.

Trace minerals are needed in small amounts and include zinc, selenium, iodine, copper, chromium and manganese.

### **The best way to prepare food**

The more food is heated, the more nutrients are destroyed. Eat vegetables semi-cooked or raw if possible. A Europe-wide study by the Institute of Food Research in Norwich, published in June 1999, indicated that caretonoid uptake from cooked carrots and green vegetables, especially spinach and broccoli, are five times more in the semi-cooked state as when eaten raw. The tough-walled cells in these raw vegetables prevent the release of caretonoids - an important antioxidant that helps in the prevention against cancer. The best preparation methods to use are steaming, poaching, boiling or baking, where heat is kept as low as possible for a short period of time. High temperature cooking methods such as grilling, deep frying, roasting and braaiing on coals should be avoided. Stir-frying is the best frying method as it keeps cooking time to a minimum.

**Some useful tips:** Choose lean meat cuts such as chicken breast. Trim all visible fat before cooking and remove the skin from chicken as it contains a lot of fat. Be careful with serving sizes to decrease the volume of fat. When grilling, make use of a slotted baking pan so that excessive fat can automatically drain off. Poultry/mince meat, boerewors and sausages may contain a lot of fat. Check the fat content before you buy such items. Also, do not use

additional oil or fat when making stews or preparing boerewors and sausages. Rather use a little canola oil or cooking spray for browning meat instead of fat or other oils.

### **Is it important to drink water?**

A person loses between 1 and 2 litres of water per day through the skin, bowels, lungs and urine as part of normal body function. It is important to replace this water and keep the body sufficiently hydrated. On average a person should drink about one glass, that is 200ml, of water for every 10kg of bodyweight per day. Eating fruit and vegetables is also an excellent way to replace fluid, as these foodstuffs are composed of 90% water.

When considering what to drink, limit the intake of alcohol, coffee with a high content in caffeine, as well as most teas with high tannin and caffeine content, as these products tend to dehydrate the body. Substitute these drinks with herbal-, ginger-, rooibos- and honeybush tea. Rooibos tea has been proven to promote anti-oxidant formation in the body. It contains little tannin and no caffeine.

Dilute fruit juice with water as it normally contains high levels of sugar - even pure fruit juices may contain high levels of fructose or sugar.

### **How much alcohol is safe to drink?**

Alcohol is not an essential food or nutrient and is not required as part of the diet. People tend to look at the drinking of alcohol as an acceptable habit but alcohol is in fact a drug, albeit a legal drug. It is addictive and people use and abuse it daily. Alcohol is consumed to relax, escape from reality and to fit in socially. Teenagers may start drinking due to peer pressure. Many people drink because they have become addicted to alcohol.

Alcohol increases the risk of various health conditions, such as heart and liver disease and works directly on the central nervous system, impairing brain function. Over time, excessive alcohol consumption can damage the function of many organs such as the brain, liver and

pancreas and may even cause cancer.

People who should avoid alcohol are: pregnant women or women trying to become pregnant; those who plan to drive or engage in activities requiring alertness and skill; people taking medications, including certain over-the-counter medicine and people with medical conditions.

### **Is it safe to smoke?**

Most people know that cigarette smoking is not healthy. One in four smokers dies at an early age because of smoking. Smoking causes heart disease, emphysema and many cancers including cancer of the mouth, throat, lung and urinary bladder.

Non-smokers are harmed by the smoke from other people's cigarettes, pipes or cigars. This kind of smoke is called environmental tobacco smoke or second hand smoke. It is the mixture of smoke exhaled by the smoker and the smoke that comes off the burning end of the cigarette, cigar or pipe between puffs. It contains thousands of chemicals that can harm both smokers and non-smokers alike.

Breathing in other people's smoke can cause cancer and heart disease in adults. If a pregnant woman or her partner smokes, she has a greater chance of having a low-weight baby. Her child may have breathing problems during its early years of life. Second hand smoke cause children to develop asthma and ear problems and is linked to an increase in cot deaths.

People become addicted to smoking. Most smokers do not realise that nicotine can be just as addictive as heroin or cocaine. More so, it causes more death and disease than all other addictions combined.

### **Is food preparation and storage important?**

Food production, includes growing, harvesting, transportation, preparation and serving thereof, which are important factors to ensure good and quality foods. At all times care must be taken to ensure food quality is not compromised. Poor food quality, whether it is

caused by poor procedures, storage, or human error, is a costly and potentially deadly problem. Food not suitable for human or animal consumption is potentially lethal. Two common contaminants are E. coli, spread through faecal matter, and mold or aflatoxins which are formed in poor storage conditions.

Bisphenol A (BPA), is found in plastics like baby feeding bottles, food packaging and in the inside lining tinned foods, have been classified as a hormone disruptor. In order to determine whether a plastic container contains BPA is to check for the presence of a recycle triangle at the bottom of the container. If the triangle contains the number '7' with the letters 'PC' for polycarbon below it, the plastic contains BPA.

Always wash your hands before you work with food. Wash vegetables and fruit with cold, running water. Try to use separate cutting boards, one for "animal" products like meat and fish and another for fruits, vegetables and bread. If you only have one cutting board, wash it when you switch from one food type to another. Plastic or glass boards are best - wooden ones tend to harbour bacteria.

Refrigerate freshly cooked food within 2 hours as bacteria can grow at room temperature after this time. Store dry food in sealed containers. Avoid eating inadequately cooked or raw meat, fish, eggs and shellfish. Always check the 'sell by' and 'use by' dates on labels.

### **How to overcome fatigue and restore energy**

Tiredness or fatigue, associated with a lack of energy is often the result of a lack of sleep or excessive stress. When asleep, the brain has to complete a number of complex tasks. It goes through five different sleep stages. The most commonly known sleep stage is called the REM or rapid eye movement sleep.

If you wake up at the end of your sleep cycle, you may feel fine. If you wake up in the middle of a cycle, you will feel tired, sleepy and groggy. People often reach for a cup of coffee when they wake up and hope to feel better. We have all been there! Drinking coffee won't help.

Coffee or any energy drink is a stimulant and eventually wears off. You will feel better for a while, but it only lasts a short time and then you are back to feeling tired again or even worse.

The effect is hard on the body. It can cause an iron and Vitamin B deficiency, which will leave you feeling constantly tired or chronically fatigued. The next major problem is that stimulants will only hide the symptoms of your tiredness - it does not address the cause of the problem. By ignoring tiredness the body is pushed to its limits and beyond. It will weaken the immune system and eventually lead to burnout and the development of chronic diseases.

A natural approach to help cure chronic fatigue is the eating of a balanced diet rich in antioxidants, such as berries, broccoli, tomatoes, red grapes, spinach and even Rooibos tea. You will need to adjust your eating patterns while on treatment. Loss of appetite is common among people who are ill or on cancer treatment.

### **Should I take vitamin supplements?**

The best source of vitamins and minerals is a well balanced diet. Supplements cannot completely replace natural vitamins in food. However, if the illness or treatment is preventing healthy eating, supplements may be necessary. Please consult your medical practitioner before taking any form of supplementation as it may affect the treatment.

### **What about herbs and salt?**

Fresh garlic is a natural antibiotic that will help fight bacterial and viral infections. Peel a small clove of garlic and swallow it whole if you do not like the taste. Garlic can also be added to soups and stews. Fresh herbs add flavour to food.

Salt is required to maintain a balance of body fluids, transmit nerve signals and for muscles to function properly. Unfortunately a lot of people take in an excess amount of salt.

Research indicates that we should reduce the amount of salt in our diet.

Unfortunately excessive amounts of salt are present in many products that are generally considered to be healthy. According to the National Department of Health the desired amount of salt for one's body is 4-6 grams per day. This is one teaspoon of salt per day. Just one cup of canned soup can contain more than 50 percent of the recommended allowance. A serving of lasagne at a restaurant can put you over your sodium allowance in one meal.

**How to limit your daily salt intake:** Limit daily sodium intake to between 1 500 and 2 400 milligrams. Ask for unsalted dishes when eating out. Season your food at home with herbs and spices rather than salt. Remove salt from recipes when possible. Don't put the saltshaker on your dining table.

Check labels for foods high in sodium like processed meats and biltong. When preparing food use iodated salt. Iodated salt is table salt mixed with a minute amount of various iodine-containing salts. Worldwide, iodine deficiency affects about two billion people and is the leading preventable cause of mental retardation. It also causes thyroid gland problems. Iodine is a micronutrient that is naturally present in the food supply in many regions. However, where natural levels of iodine in the soil are low and the iodine is not taken up by vegetables, iodine added to salt provides the small but essential amount needed by humans.

### **Complications associated with chemo- and radiotherapy**

**A dry mouth** - Some patients may have a significant loss of saliva production. To remedy this, drink small amounts of water as frequently as possible and suck ice cubes. Freeze a fruit juice in ice trays to make flavoured ice cubes to suck. Add a few drops of lemon juice to water to stimulate saliva production in the mouth and sip the water slowly. Apply Vaseline, Aloe Gel or honey balm products to your lips to prevent

it from drying out and cracking. If this problem continues, ask your health professional for advice.

**What to eat when you have a sore throat and mouth** - eat soft foods like yoghurt, oats and stews. Sauces and gravies moisten foods, making it easier to swallow. Avoid food and drink that is very hot. Try drinking through a straw.

Avoid rough or dry foods such as toast, biscuits or raw vegetables. Acidic foods like pineapple, citrus and tomatoes may aggravate the problem. Keep the mouth as healthy as possible at this time. Brush your teeth with a soft brush after each meal or use a soft paediatric toothbrush. If wearing dentures, soak it overnight in a cleansing solution. Treatment may cause the tongue to be coated. Use a solution of one teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda dissolved in 0.5 litre water to clean. Stop smoking as this can worsen the problem.

If you experience difficulty in chewing or swallowing, a soft or liquid diet is recommended that is high in protein, energy, vitamins and minerals. Choose a good meal replacement supplement.

### **General guidelines for a soft or liquid diet:**

Chop up fish, eggs, chicken and well-cooked vegetables and moisten them with gravy or stock. Ensure that all foods are soft and well chewed before being swallowed.

### **A loss of appetite is very common**

Eat any healthy food that you feel like, whenever you can. Your appetite may be better in the mornings - try to eat a little more at this time. Eat small meals with snacks like fruit in between. Experiment with different flavours as your ability to taste might have changed. Mash cooked beans and legumes to make a sandwich filling.

If you are unable to eat, substitute meals with one or two glasses of high protein drinks to provide your body with much needed protein and energy. Add Weet-Bix to soups or stews to

thicken its texture and to make it a complete meal. Eat out of small containers or cups as it is easier and makes it more attractive and palatable than having to face a large plate of food.

### **What to do if too tired to eat**

Many times friends would like to help but don't know what to do. Asking them to do the shopping and cooking not only gives you a break, but gives them a chance to be supportive.

### **If feeling full after a small meal**

Eat small meals with snacks in between. Chew the food thoroughly and slowly before swallowing. Avoid greasy foods, fried foods and rich sauces that may make this problem worse. Limit the intake of liquids at mealtimes and rather drink it 30 minutes before or after a meal.

### **Feeling nauseous is one of the most common side effects**

Nausea, with or without vomiting, is a common side effect with various forms of cancer treatment and of the disease itself. It can prevent you from getting the needed nutrients. Bland foods are easier to tolerate when feeling nauseous. These foods include dry toast, low-fat yoghurt, sorbet, pretzels, boiled skinless chicken, clear liquids, soups and crushed ice chips.

Greasy, fatty, fried, spicy or very sweet foods may contribute to your nausea.

Here is a list of ideas that may be helpful to deal with your nausea:

- Let someone else prepare your meals so that you don't smell the food cooking
- Take a short walk before each meal to stimulate your appetite
- Eat in a room with good ventilation
- Eat soft fruit such as melon and paw-paw or drink lemon in sparkling water
- If you feel sick when you wake up, eat something dry, such as toast or Provita preferably before getting up
- Do not drink during a meal. Wait ½ hour

after meals before having a drink

- Eat small meals during the day
- Eat and drink slowly to give your stomach time to adjust
- Eat cold foods like grated apple slowly
- Sip iced water or suck an ice cube
- Avoid lying flat after eating
- Rest after meals to let your meal settle
- Distract yourself while eating by listening to music or watching TV
- If feeling nauseous, avoid your favourite foods as you may end up developing an aversion to it
- Certain foods, events or surroundings may trigger nausea. Keep track of these triggers and change your diet and schedule in accordance to avoid the reaction

### **Remedies that may help with nausea**

Fresh or powdered ginger is effective in treating nausea. It can be used before or after chemotherapy. Make a refreshing drink by grating a little ginger into water. Place it in the fridge and sip throughout the day. Ginger tea and ginger ale may also be helpful in controlling nausea. Mint is another good remedy for nausea and indigestion. Make yourself some tea by putting mint leaves in hot water and allow it to cool before putting it in the fridge. Add lemon to any of these drinks to improve the taste and sip this throughout the day.

### **What will stop the vomiting?**

Vomiting may occur with nausea. If vomiting is severe it may lead to dehydration which may have serious consequences. Relaxation and breathing techniques are helpful to prevent or control vomiting.

Once vomiting is under control, sip small amounts of clear liquids. Start taking a teaspoon full every 10 minutes and gradually increase the volume. If the vomiting remains under control, you can start sipping diluted fruit juices and clear soups to build up your strength. Eventually add soft bland foods such as mashed potato to the diet.

### **When unable to taste the food**

People undergoing cancer treatment often complain that they experience changes in their taste and smell. They may have a metallic taste in their mouths and an aversion to specific foods. If food begins to taste different, try the following to increase palatability:

- Eat the foods you like as often as possible
- Try different foods that are new and interesting to taste
- Enhance the flavour of foods by using more and stronger natural seasonings and herbs like lemon, mint, rosemary, oreganum, basil and ginger
- Eat foods at room temperature, rather than hot
- Tea and coffee can be replaced with diluted grape juice, rooibos and herbal teas

### **Constipation may become a problem**

Changing your diet may help to alleviate this and prevent it happening again. Consult your doctor before taking any laxatives as it may interfere with your treatment. Drink plenty of fluids, especially water.

A warm drink, first thing in the morning, may also help. A glass of water with a little lemon juice and honey added is recommended. Your diet should include foods that are high in fibre, such as dry beans, lentils, fresh vegetables and fruits. Add Weet-Bix to soups and stews as the added fibre will assist in the prevention of constipation. If able to exercise, take a short walk as it will help the digestive tract to remain active. Prune juice and foods such as dried, stewed fruit, high fibre cereal and paw-paw contribute to a healthy bowel functioning.

### **Diarrhoea may also be experienced**

If the diarrhoea lasts for more than two days, contact your doctor. Avoid too much high fibre foods. Eat small frequent meals and drink plenty of fluids to alleviate this problem. Eat foods and liquids high in salt and potassium, such as clear soup, bananas, grated apple, marmite and mashed potato. Sachets of rehydrate (available from your pharmacy) or Lucozade are excellent products to treat

dehydration. Avoid milk and milk based products and replace with soya milk and tofu.

A recommended remedy for diarrhoea is the following: boil white rice and drink some of the water that the rice has been cooked in as often as possible. Foods to eat are oats, steamed fish, rice, mashed potato, mashed banana and grated apple.

### **To conclude**

Don't be influenced by everybody's advice. People mean well, but remember you are in control. Eat as well as you can as often as you can. Do not allow your diet to become a source of stress to you. Remember; you don't need to be too hard on yourself - try to enjoy your food and adjust your eating pattern to suit your situation.

Do not hesitate to contact CANSA on the toll free number **0800 22 66 22** or visit CANSA's website at [www.cansa.org.za](http://www.cansa.org.za) for assistance and further information.

**We wish you strength and all of the best.**

## **A word of thanks**

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# Get in touch with us

There are CANSA Care Centres in communities throughout South Africa. If you wish to find out more regarding CANSA's care and support programmes, please contact the CANSA Care Centre nearest you. You can find your nearest CANSA Care Centre on [www.cansa.org.za](http://www.cansa.org.za)

We also support cancer patients and their caregivers on our Facebook support groups:

- **CANSA Survivors** - Champions of Hope
- **CANSA Caring for the Caregivers**
- **CANSA TLC** - Childhood Cancer Support (parents of children affected by cancer)

Follow CANSA on Twitter: @CANSA (<http://www.twitter.com/CANSA>), join CANSA on Facebook: CANSA The Cancer Association of South Africa and follow CANSA on Instagram: @cancerassociationofsouthafrica

\*The responsibility rests with patients to contact CANSA for assistance. CANSA is not informed of any diagnoses / of patients being treated at medical centres. Families need to obtain permission from patients, before CANSA may contact them.



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