
Discharge Instructions After Treatment for Cancer of the Esophagus

You've been diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus, the abnormal and uncontrolled growth of cells in the esophagus, the tube that connects your mouth and stomach. You may have had surgery, radiation therapy, and/or chemotherapy to treat this disease. This sheet will help you remember how to care for yourself after surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. Also be sure to follow any instructions you've gotten from your cancer treatment team.

Home care after surgery

Here's what to do at home after surgery for esophageal cancer:

- Follow the diet your healthcare provider talked to you about.
- Check your incision site every day for at least 7 days. Change the dressing per the directions you were given.
- Use pain medicines as needed.
- Don't drive until you are no longer taking pain medicine. This may take 2 to 4 weeks.
- Plan rest breaks to avoid shortness of breath.
- Do deep breathing and controlled coughing exercises. Ask your healthcare provider for guidelines.
- If you smoke, do your best to stop:
 - Get help. Enroll in a stop-smoking program to increase your chances of success.
 - Ask your healthcare provider about medicines or other methods to help you quit.
 - Ask family members to quit smoking with you.
 - Don't allow smoking in your home or around you.

Home care after chemotherapy

Here's what to do at home after chemotherapy for esophageal cancer:

Prevent or manage mouth sores

Many people get mouth sores during chemo. So don't be discouraged if you do, even if you're following all your healthcare provider's instructions. Do these things to help prevent mouth sores or to ease discomfort:

- Brush your teeth with a soft-bristle toothbrush after every meal and at bedtime.

- If your platelet count is low, or if your gums are inflamed, flossing may cause gum bleeding. You may need to limit flossing.
- Use an oral swab or special soft toothbrush if your gums bleed during regular brushing.
- Use mouthwashes given to you as directed.
- Keep your mouth moist. Use salt and baking soda to clean your mouth. Mix 1 teaspoon of salt and 1 teaspoon of baking soda into an 8-ounce glass of warm water. Swish and spit.
- Watch your mouth and tongue for white patches. This can be a sign of fungal or yeast infection, a common side effect of chemo. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about these patches. You may need medicine to help you fight the fungal infection.
- If you have dentures, keep them clean and limit the time you wear them.

Manage other side effects

Suggestions include the following:

- Try to exercise. Exercise keeps you strong and keeps your heart and lungs active. It helps you feel less tired. Walk as much as you can comfortably.
- Let your healthcare provider know if your throat is sore. You may have an infection that needs treatment.
- Remember, many patients feel sick and lose their appetite during treatment. Eat small meals several times a day to keep your strength up.
 - Choose bland foods with little taste or smell.
 - Be sure to cook all food thoroughly. This kills bacteria and helps you avoid infection.
 - Eat soft foods. They're less likely to cause stomach irritation.
 - Talk to your provider if you're having trouble getting in enough foods or liquids.
- Use anti-nausea medicines as needed. Don't wait until you start vomiting.
- Keep clean. During treatment, your body can't fight germs very well.
 - Take short baths or showers with warm water. Avoid very hot or cold water.
 - Use moisturizing soap. Treatment can make your skin dry.
 - Use lotion several times a day to help relieve dry skin.

Home care after radiation therapy

Here's what to do at home following radiation therapy for esophageal cancer:

Skin care

Do's and don'ts include:

- Don't scrub the treated area.
- Ask your therapy team which lotion to use and if it's OK to shave.
- Avoid sun on the treated area. Ask your therapy team about using a sunscreen.
- Don't remove ink marks unless your radiation therapist says it's OK.
- Protect your skin from heat or cold. Don't use hot tubs, saunas, heating pads, or ice packs.
- Wear soft, loose clothing to avoid rubbing your skin.

Other home care

Tips include:

- Stock up on easy-to-prepare foods.
- Eat foods high in protein and calories.
- Drink plenty of water and other fluids, unless directed otherwise.
- Ask your healthcare provider before taking any vitamins or supplements.
- Be prepared for hair loss and sunburn-like skin irritation in the area being treated.
- If your mouth or throat becomes dry or sore, sip cool water. Ice chips may also help.

Follow-up

Make a follow-up appointment as directed by our staff.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following:

- Trouble breathing
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Chills
- Signs of infection around the incision (redness, drainage, warmth, pain)
- Shortness of breath, especially at rest
- Trouble swallowing
- Nausea or vomiting
- Incision that opens up or pulls apart
- Cloudy thinking or trouble concentrating

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- Ongoing fatigue
 - Rapid, irregular heartbeat; chest pain
 - Dizziness or lightheadedness
 - Constant feeling of being cold
 - New or unusual lumps, bumps, or swelling
 - Persistent diarrhea
 - New redness, pain, swelling, or warmth in your leg(s) or arm(s)