How to Relieve Liver Cancer-Related Constipation and Other Digestive Problems

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Liver Cancer and Constipation, Diarrhea, and Other Stomach Issues

If you've been diagnosed with stomach cancer, the symptoms can be confusing. After all, the symptoms that you read about online are extensive.

For this reason, liver cancer is often diagnosed in later stages of the disease. Symptoms are often not noticed or not recognized because they can be vague and misdiagnosed as other diseases.

Symptoms of Liver Cancer

People who have liver cancer do not actually have the symptoms of liver cancer in the early stages. If they do have symptoms, they may only have a couple — the symptoms will vary from person to person and they may change as the tumor on the liver grows:

- Weight loss without trying
- Loss of appetite
- Pain in the right upper abdomen or the right shoulder blade
- Fatigue with weakness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Swelling and bloating in the abdomen
- Jaundice, which is yellowing of the skin and eyes (often caused by cirrhosis of the liver)

Specific types of liver cancer that causes hormonal fluctuations can cause additional symptoms:

- Hypercalcemia (elevated blood calcium levels) which can cause constipation, nausea and diarrhea
- Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar levels) which can cause many symptoms, such as feelings of faintness and fatigue
- Elevated red blood cell count, which can cause flushing of the face
- Specific to men, enlarged breasts and shrinking of the testicles

When Stomach Issues Are a Concern

Liver cancer stomach issues can occur as a result of the cancer. Although constipation is not a hallmark symptom of liver cancer, as previously stated it can be a symptom of liver cancer if the cancer is a specific type that is caused by hormonal fluctuations.

Diarrhea is also not a common symptom of liver cancer. This is also not to mean that it cannot happen.

Remember that each person with liver cancer has their own set of symptoms — each person's symptoms will not be the same as the next person's.

Keep in mind that symptoms associated with cancer may also be a result of the treatment plan selected to battle the cancer and perhaps not a result of the disease process itself. Stomach issues associated with liver cancer may likely be associated with the treatment plan as opposed to the disease process.

Liver Cancer and Diarrhea

If you find that you have diarrhea, here are some tips for managing it at home. Keep in mind that you should also speak with your oncologist if you're dealing with this uncomfortable symptom.

- **The most important thing to remember is to stay hydrated.** Becoming dehydrated can worsen other symptoms. Drink clear liquids, such as water, juice, broth and popsicles. Keep in mind that consuming more than your usual amount of liquids is generally recommended.
- **Unless contraindicated, such as if you have kidney problems, consume foods and liquids with extra potassium.** Having diarrhea depletes your body of electrolytes and replacing the electrolytes is important. Foods that are rich in electrolytes include bananas, potatoes and apricots. Consider electrolyte beverages if necessary.
- **Avoid foods that are harsh to the digestive tract.** This includes spicy foods, dairy, alcohol and foods that are acidic. These foods may worsen diarrhea.
- **Consider a probiotic.** Probiotics can be found in dairy products such as yogurt, or as an over-the-counter supplement. With excessive diarrhea, you are ridding yourself of the "good" bacteria in the gut and replacing those bacteria with a probiotic is helpful.

Liver Cancer and Constipation

Liver cancer constipation can also be managed at home. It is also wise to speak with your oncologist though because it can sometimes become an emergency situation. Here are some tips for managing constipation at home:

- **Staying hydrated is important.** Consume at least eight to 10 cups of water, unless contraindicated by another medical condition. In addition, try a hot beverage, which could possibly stimulate a bowel movement.
- **Speak with your health care provider about the use of a stool softener or psyllium fiber.** These can be used daily to keep the stools soft and easy to pass.
- **Meet with a dietitian to design a liver cancer diet plan that is rich in fiber and bulky foods.** Foods to incorporate into your diet may include whole grains, fruits and vegetables and beans.
- **Use laxatives.** However, it's important that you only use them if recommended by your healthcare provider.

The Bottom Line

You don't need to suffer with bowel issues during your cancer treatment. Speak with your health care providers to come up with a home care routine.