

Effects of Chemotherapy & the Tendency to Fall Down

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Walks Beside Coaching & Consulting

Chemotherapy can cause a number of side effects that can affect balance and movement, causing individuals to fall down more frequently. One of the most common side effects of many chemo drugs is central and peripheral neuropathy (injury to the nerves from chemotherapy that interferes with their normal function). Normal function includes sensations that allow people to walk, muscles to move, and adjustments to be made for changes in physical environment (such as, the ability to go up stairs). The numbness and lack of feeling resulting from neuropathy affect stability and movement.

Another side effect of chemo, loss of red blood cells, leading to anemia which causes weakness and dizziness, even to the point of falling down. A low red blood cell count can also cause breathlessness. Breathlessness can make patients feel as if they are "passing out".

The nausea and loss of appetite that often come with chemo also cause weakness and dizziness. Evaluate if the person is getting enough nutrition. If they can't tolerate food, try Ensure®, Boost®, or other nutritional supplements; and, stay hydrated. Remember that dizziness and falling down can be symptoms of many things, including other potentially severe medical illnesses, particularly cardiovascular disease and stroke. Don't let falling down go without evaluation.

For more information, contact Bonnie Bajorek Daneker, <http://www.caring.com/experts/bonnie-bajorek-daneker>. She speaks regularly at cancer research and support functions, including PANCAN and Cancer Survivor's Network. She is a former member of the Executive Committee of the CSN at St. Joseph's Hospital of Atlanta and the Georgia Chapter of the Lymphoma Research Foundation. She is the author of "The Compassionate Caregiver's Guide to Caring for Someone with Cancer."