



Gynecologic Disease Center

At Walter Reed Army Medical Center

When to Call Your Health Care Provider

The following situations are emergencies and should be reported to your doctor immediately:

- Fevers of greater than 101 degrees or severe, shaking chills.
- Nausea and vomiting of coffee colored material or large volumes of blood.
- Black tarry or very bloody bowel movements.
- Severe or persistent chest pain.
- Shortness of breath (when you can not catch your breath).
- Nausea or vomiting that prevents you from keeping any fluids or medications on your stomach.
- Severe headache or severe confusion, seizures or symptoms of a stroke:
 - Such as weakness involving one side of your body.
 - Weakness of both your legs with difficulty walking or urinating.

Cancer and cancer treatment can cause your body to go through many changes. Knowing what symptoms are normal and which are ones you should talk to your physician about can be confusing. If your questions are of a routine nature, your doctor will be happy to discuss these with you during your regular office visit. If you have a problem or a question which occurs between your regular office visits, please feel free to call your nurse to discuss this during regular office hours (7:30am- 4pm). This allows us to pull your chart to know how your doctor has been caring for you and what medications you have been receiving. **Please have your pill bottles or your medication list with you when you call**, so we can be certain we know exactly what medications you are taking.

There is always a doctor on call to help you if you have an emergency. The doctor on call can be reached by calling 202-782-8790. If the doctor is away from their desk, please leave a message and they will call you back. If you have not heard from the doctor within the hour, please call the nurses' station on Ward 65 (202-782-1665) and ask for the GYN oncology resident to be paged. If you have not received a call back within 30 minutes, please call again. The doctor may be taking care of other patients when you call, but the staff on Ward 65 should be able to tell you when he/she will be available.

Please remember to plan ahead when you need to have prescriptions refilled. Call your nurse during office hours (7:30am-4pm) two to three days before your medication runs out. This is particularly important if you are taking strong pain medications. Always check on Friday morning to make sure you have enough pain medicine to get you through the weekend. Not all strong pain medicines are stocked in every pharmacy, so you may need to come to Walter Reed to pick a particular medication up. Do not let your pain medicines get below a 3 or 4 days supply.



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Some problems that may develop related to your cancer or your treatment include:

- Fever or chills that may indicate an infection.
- Bleeding or easy bruising.
- New or worsening trouble breathing indicating lung or chest problems.
- New or worsening pain.
- Uncontrolled nausea or vomiting.
- Mental changes.
- Trouble swallowing or mouth sores, especially if you cannot drink liquids because of pain.
- Constipation.
- Diarrhea.
- Bladder irritation.
- Skin changes.
- Drug reactions (itching, rash, swelling).

Fever and chills

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- You have a fever greater than 101 degrees.
- You have severe shaking chills.

When you call, the nurse will ask you what your temperature is. Always have a working thermometer in your home and be familiar with how to use it. A digital thermometer is the most user-friendly. Please take your temperature before you call. This is especially important if you have had chemotherapy 1-2 weeks before you develop fever or chills.

Bleeding and easy bruising

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- You bleed or vomit what looks like coffee ground material or bright red material.
- You have black tarry or bloody bowel movements.
- You get little red dots or bruises on your skin, especially on your feet or legs.
- You have increased bruising.

It is especially important to call if you are bleeding and feel light headed, dizzy or faint. If you see bright red blood on the toilet tissue or a few streaks of blood on your bowel movement you may have hemorrhoids. This is not an emergency and you can call the office to discuss this during regular office hours.



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Lung and chest problems- trouble breathing

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- You have difficulty breathing and cannot catch your breath.
- You have severe and/or persistent chest pain.
- You have congestion in the chest.
- You have severe congestion in the chest or a new or persistent cough which produces thick yellow, green, or bloody sputum.
- You cough up blood.
- You have a fever with the above symptoms.

The nurse will ask you if you have had any head congestion, if you have and chest congestion, and if you are bringing up any phlegm (sputum). She will ask you what color it is. You will be asked if you are running a fever and what your temperature is and how long you have had the fever. You will be asked if the cough and the fever make you short of breath. Please be ready to answer these questions.

Pain

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- You have any new, severe pain.
- Your pain is accompanied by other physical problems such as being unable to walk, eat, or urinate.
- Your pain or tenderness is located at an IV site including a Port-Cath site or PICC line.
- You have pain, tingling or numbness in the hands, legs or feet. If this pain interferes with your ability to walk or continue your daily activities, it is especially important that you call us.
- Your pain is not relieved by the pain medications which your doctor has prescribed.

The nurse will ask you where your pain is located, if it is sharp or a dull pain or if it is achy. The nurse will ask you if you have your pain all the time or if it is intermittent, or if the pain is worse when you move. The nurse will ask you how long you have had your pain and if any of your pain medications relieve the pain, and what medications you have tried. Please be ready to answer these questions.

Nausea and vomiting

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- Heartburn, nausea, or vomiting continues for more than one to two days.
- Any blood or material that looks like coffee grounds appears in your vomit.
- You are unable to take your nausea medications.
- You are unable to drink more than one or two quarts of fluid a day.



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Mental Changes

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- Confusion occurs.
- You have a new headache.
- You develop difficulty with your balance.
- You develop inability to use your arms or legs.
- You develop a seizure.
- You have a severe headache or severe confusion, or symptoms of a stroke such as weakness involving one side of your body or weakness of both of your legs with difficulty walking or urinating.

You may not realize that you are confused or having mental problems and this may be a problem which another family member realizes before you do. It is important that your family members know to call us if you develop these problems.

Trouble swallowing: mouth sores

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- You are unable to swallow any food.
- Your weight has dropped three to five pounds in the previous week because of trouble swallowing.
- You have a dry, burning, scratchy or very swollen throat.
- You have a red, shiny mouth or ulcers in your mouth or on your tongue.
- White patches appear on your tongue or on the inside of your mouth.
- You have bleeding gums or a swollen tongue.

The nurse will ask you if you have looked for white spots in the back of your throat. Please get a family member or use a flashlight and a mirror to look at the back of your throat for white spots. The nurse will ask you if you have any sores on your tongue or gums. She will ask if you are running a fever. She will ask you if your lymph glands are swollen and, if so, how long they have been swollen. She will also ask if you have any head congestion. Please be ready to answer these questions.

Constipation

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- You have not had a bowel movement in more than three days.
- You cannot move your bowels within one or two days after taking a laxative.
- You have persistent cramps or vomiting along with your constipation.



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Diarrhea

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- You see a large amount of blood in your stool or your stool is “tarry” in color.
- You have three or more loose or watery bowel movements per day for more than two or three days in a row.
- You lose five or more pounds after the diarrhea starts.

Bladder irritation (cystitis)

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- You see a lot of blood in your urine.
- You are unable to urinate.
- You have severe burning when you urinate.
- You have increased frequency or need to urinate.
- Your urine has developed a bad color.
- You have a fever of 101 degrees associated with these symptoms. If so, you probably have a bladder or kidney infection and it is especially important to call your nurse GYN oncology case manager to talk about this.

Skin

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- You experience redness, tenderness, swelling or discharge from sores, IV sites, blood draw sites, your Port-A-Cath, or PICC line site.
- You have any broken skin or peeling which occurs on the treatment area.
- You develop redness, swelling, or increased warmth on the treatment area.

Drug reactions

Call your nurse GYN oncology case manager if:

- You develop an itchy rash or hives.
- You experience itching or swelling of hands, feet or face.
- You experience unusual restlessness or swelling of your hands, feet, face or tongue.



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Walter Reed Army Medical Center
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202-782-8513 (Phone) *Please note: only military health beneficiaries should call this telephone number.*
202-782-9278 (Fax)

This material is provided for informational purposes only as a service of the Gynecologic Disease Center. It is not intended to provide comprehensive coverage of the subject or to suggest a diagnosis or treatment modality. For further information on this subject, please contact your health care provider.