



What Are Some Common Symptoms of Lung Cancer?

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Andrew Schorr:

Christine, let's start with you. What are some of the tools you have available now? And let's talk about the typical physical symptoms that people may face going through lung cancer treatment today.

Dr. Lovly:

Yeah. So, I'm going to start with one which is very common and can be very uncomfortable, which is constipation. So sometimes the medicines that we use to treat the cancer can cause constipation. Pain medicines can cause constipation, and it can be very uncomfortable, this symptom.

But I tell patients to be aggressive about monitoring how often they're having bowel movements, using stool softeners or things like MiraLAX, which I really like. It's a powder that you dissolve in water every day.

And if that does not work, there are actually medicines that your doctor can prescribe you to help with particularly the constipation that's related to pain medication.

There are a host of symptoms that patients deal with every day. I started with constipation, because I think it's very common. It can be multi-factorial from the cancer treatment itself, from all the medicines that we give to help the cancer, the symptoms related to the cancer. And then a lot of time just not being up and about as much as normal while you're going through cancer therapy can also make the constipation worse. So to me this is something that I think is very important to think about as a symptom that's very common across lung cancer patients but also all cancer patients, and it's something that we can be very aggressive in treating and managing both with medicines over the counter and with medicines that your doctor can prescribe you.

Andrew Schorr:

Okay. Pick another one, another symptom that you hear about a lot.

Dr. Lovly:

Yes. So I think tiredness and fatigue is one that we hear about a lot, and this is across the board. Basically, every cancer therapy that we can give, whether it's chemotherapy or targeted therapies or immune therapy, cause some degree of tiredness and fatigue.

This is a symptom from my perspective that's a little bit more difficult to manage, because there's not necessarily a magic pill that can make it better, although there are certain things that your doctor can look for. Such as, for example, sometimes when people's thyroid levels get low, which can be a result of some of the cancer medicines we use, particularly some of the immunotherapies, your thyroid is low, you can feel more tired.

So, I think the first thing to think about is the tiredness related to something medical like thyroid dysfunction that we can test for and correct with medicines. And if it's not, what are other sort of therapies that we can give to help people? And I think if there's not something that's easily correctable like a thyroid problem, then the tiredness and fatigue, I think trying to get up and move about as much as possible, even though it seems contradictory to say exercise and walk around when you're tired, I think having that exercise and building your stamina actually is very helpful.

I think another thing is keeping your nutrition up, very important during cancer therapy, not only to combat the tiredness and fatigue, to make sure you're getting the right nutrients, but also to help keep your body as strong as possible while you're receiving therapy.

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