

How's your knowledge of anorexia in cancer?

Have you noticed that some types of cancer seem to cause more anorexia and cachexia than others, and some patients in particular become anorexic and cachectic much more rapidly and earlier in the disease than others?

Did you know that cancer anorexia is probably induced by inflammatory substances secreted either by the cancer, or by the body in response to the cancer?

Did you know that cancer-induced cachexia is also produced by inflammatory and other substances, rather than just by lack of caloric intake and increased caloric expenditure because of tumour growth?

Did you know that we can help?

- We can **improve appetite** with medications such as **megestrol** (Megace™) 160mg tid.
- **Steroids** such as **dexamethasone** 4mg daily or bid will markedly and quickly improve appetite, but watch for toxicity.
- Although we can improve appetite and thus make people feel better, we usually **cannot make patients gain weight or live longer**. Still, the improved sense of well being from improved appetite usually makes everyone happy.

Bottom line: try Megace 160mg tid if the patient has a reasonable life expectancy (a few months or more), and dexamethasone for its quick and potent action if time is short and toxicity is not a worry.

****Practice tip: Remember that a decrease in appetite is normal at the very end of life. If appetite doesn't improve with treatment, or treatment is not indicated, advise the family not to force food on the patient—patients are often unable to eat and may feel sicker if forced to do so. Try emphasizing fluids instead of food****

Want to learn more?

Call us: Palliative Care Community Advice Line: (905) 548-5565 —available 24 hrs a day.

We're here to help you.