

Understanding Nausea and Vomiting During Cancer Treatment

What is nausea and vomiting?

Nausea is feeling sick to your stomach or the sensation when you feel that you are about to vomit.

Vomiting is when you throw up the contents of your stomach through your mouth, and sometimes through your nose.

What should I know about nausea and vomiting?

- Nausea and vomiting can be a side effect of cancer treatment.
- You can feel queasy or have an upset stomach.
- Feeling nauseous can lead to vomiting.
- Some medications can help relieve these symptoms.

What puts me at risk of experiencing nausea and vomiting?

- Cancer
- Cancer treatment like chemotherapy and radiation therapy
- Other medications that are not cancer treatment
- Constipation
- Stomach blockages
- Inner ear problems
- Infections
- Anxiety
- Motion sickness
- Certain foods and drinks (e.g., too much caffeine, sugary drinks, or alcohol)

How is nausea and vomiting evaluated?

- **Your care team may ask you to describe the following:**
 - When nausea and/or vomiting started.
 - How many episodes of nausea and/or vomiting you have had in the past 24–48 hours.
 - If there is any blood present in your vomit.
 - Any recent dietary changes or new problems with food.
 - Any changes in your prescribed or over-the-counter medications, supplements, and herbals.
- **Your care team may request the following:**
 - Blood tests to check for related medical conditions.
 - Review of all of your medications, including your cancer medications, to determine if one or more of them is the cause.

What can happen if my symptoms are not managed?

- You might get dehydrated.
- You might lose vitamins and electrolytes, which your body needs to function well.
- You might lose your appetite.
- You might lose weight.
- You might feel more tired than usual.

What can I do to prevent or lessen nausea and vomiting?

- Take your anti-nausea medications as recommended by your care team.
 - These medications are called antiemetics.
 - There are two ways to take anti-nausea medications:
 1. You may take them on a consistent schedule.
 2. Some may be taken as needed. Take these as soon as you start to feel nauseous.

- Sometimes 1 or more medications may be taken to prevent or treat nausea.
- Eating a small snack before receiving cancer treatment might help.
- Wait at least 1 hour to eat after receiving your cancer treatment.
- Relaxation exercises like listening to music, slow breathing, and doing yoga might help prevent nausea and vomiting that is caused by anxiety, also called anticipatory nausea and vomiting.

What can I do to treat or manage nausea and vomiting at home?

- Eat 5 or 6 small meals during the day instead of 3 big meals.
- Eat before you get too hungry. An empty stomach can make nausea worse.
- Eat foods that are easy on the stomach, such as dry cereal, white toast, and crackers, without liquids first thing in the morning.
- Try lemon, lime, or other tart-flavored foods.
- Sip on fluids throughout the day, like water, juice, broth, semi-flat soda, ginger ale, electrolyte supplements (Pedialyte), and low-sugar sports drinks (Gatorade).
- Consuming ginger could help relieve nausea. It comes in capsules, powders, tea, chews, and other drinks.
- Avoid strong odors and smells.

What might my care team provide to help?

Your care team can prescribe or recommend over-the-counter medications to help relieve or lessen your nausea or vomiting. Take your medications as directed by your care team.

When should I call my care team?

- If your anti-nausea medicine you are taking is not working and you are still feeling nausea and/or vomiting.
- If you are unable to drink fluids for more than 1 day due to constant nausea or vomiting.
- If the nausea does not let you carry out your daily activities.
- If you vomit 4–5 times in 1 day.

How can I tell if my nausea and vomiting is getting better?

- The goal of anti-nausea medication is to prevent nausea and vomiting before it happens. You will know that your symptoms are getting better when you don't feel as much nausea or vomiting during or after your cancer treatment.

What questions should I ask my care team about nausea and vomiting?

- Is it helpful for me to track my symptoms? What do you recommend?
- Do any of my other medical conditions increase my chance of experiencing nausea or vomiting?
- Do any of my medications I take for other conditions contribute to nausea and vomiting?
- Do you recommend any changes to my medications to help prevent or control nausea or vomiting?
- Can I take over-the-counter anti-nausea medications? Which one do you recommend?
- What lifestyle changes do you recommend to manage my nausea or vomiting?
- What are my options if nausea or vomiting cannot be controlled while I am receiving cancer treatment?
- Should I take my anti-nausea medication again if I throw up right after taking it?

Where can I find out more information about nausea and vomiting?

Nausea and Vomiting | American Cancer Society

- <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/nausea-and-vomiting.html>

Nausea and Vomiting | Cancer.Net

- <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html>

Nausea and Vomiting | National Cancer Institute

- <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/nausea-vomiting>

Nausea and Vomiting | National Comprehensive Cancer Network

- <https://www.nccn.org/patients/guidelines/content/PDF/nausea-patient.pdf>

Notes

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Scan the QR code below to access this education sheet.



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