

Managing Nausea and Vomiting

Nausea is an unpleasant feeling in the stomach that usually precedes vomiting. Nausea and vomiting may occur during your treatment, a few hours after your treatment (acute), or much later (delayed).

Please note: nausea and vomiting are not always side effects of cancer treatments and many people may not experience either.

Nausea may occur in people who:

- have had general anesthesia (for surgery)
- are taking certain medications
- are receiving chemotherapy or radiation treatments

Cancer cells reproduce very quickly, and many chemotherapy medications work by attacking cells that are reproducing rapidly. The cells that line your digestive tract also reproduce rapidly, and so they are likely to be affected by chemotherapy. The good news is that your body will replace these cells with new, healthy cells when treatment ends. In the meantime, you may have nausea and vomiting. Other treatments may cause nausea by irritating your mouth, esophagus, or stomach; or by affecting your sense of balance.

Medications

It is important to keep in contact with your doctors and nurses about how you are feeling. In addition to the tips in this brochure, there are medications your doctor can prescribe to prevent, lessen, or treat nausea and vomiting. Anti-nausea medications can be taken by mouth, through an IV (intravenously) or intramuscular injection, by wearing a patch, by using a rectal suppository, or by placing a dissolvable strip under your tongue or inside your cheek. Follow your doctor's instructions carefully on when and how to take your medications. Write down which medications to take first, or if you should take a medication with food.

Medication Table

The following table lists some common medications used to prevent and/or treat nausea and vomiting. You and your doctor will work together to find what medication, or combination, works best for you.

Generic Name	Brand Name	Possible Side Effects	Treat or Prevent
dexamethasone	Decadron®	headache, restlessness	prevent
dolasetron	Anzemet®	arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms), diarrhea	prevent
dronabinol	Marinol®	dizziness, drowsiness, dry mouth	prevent
diphenhydramine	Benadryl®	dry mouth, headache	both
granisetron	Kytril®	constipation, headache	both
lorazepam	Ativan®	drowsiness	treat
metoclopramide	Reglan® Metozolv® ODT	drowsiness, restlessness	both
ondansetron	Zofran®	constipation, headache	prevent
palonosetron	Aloxi®	constipation, headache	prevent
prochlorperazine	Compazine® Compro®	drowsiness, dry mouth, restlessness	treat
promethazine	Phenergan® Promac®	dry mouth, restlessness, sleepiness	treat
thiethylperazine	Torecan®	dizziness, dry mouth	treat
trimethobenzamide	Tigan®	dizziness (at high dosage), drowsiness	treat

Helpful Foods

Here are some foods and drinks that are generally easier on the stomach.

- Ice pops
- Clear soups, clear sodas such as ginger ale (drink flat soda or stir it well before drinking to get rid of the carbonation), Kool-Aid®, and Gatorade®
- Weak tea, fruit juices, and nectars (avoid citrus and acidic juices)
- White bread, white rice, cooked white potatoes, white pastas, creamed rice or wheat cereals, crackers, and dry toast
- Bananas, applesauce, and cooked fruits
- Yogurt, pudding, and cottage cheese
- Scrambled or soft boiled eggs
- Smooth peanut butter
- Cooked chicken or turkey (no skin), lean beef, and fish (not fried)
- Liquid supplements, such as Ensure®

Foods to Avoid

These foods and drinks are more likely to cause nausea and stomach upset.

- Greasy, fried, and fatty foods
- Spicy foods
- Acidic foods and drinks
- Coffee, tea, energy drinks, and candy that includes caffeine (including chocolate)
- Alcohol
- High fiber foods: bran, oatmeal, fresh fruits, whole-grain breads, broccoli, corn, and beans

What Else Can I Do?

- If your nausea only lasts an hour or two, you may want to avoid eating and just take a few sips of water or (weak) juice or tea to prevent becoming dehydrated (excessive loss of fluids from your body). If nausea lasts longer, you will need to find ways to get the nutrients and fluids your body needs.
- Try eating small meals or snacks frequently, rather than large meals.
- Eat and drink foods at room temperature.
- Eat bland foods.
- If you cannot eat or drink very much, try a salty, bland food (such as pretzels), as the salt will help you retain bodily fluids.
- Drink most of your fluids between meals; only drink enough to keep food moist at meals.
- If you are vomiting, wait an hour or so and then try clear liquids. If you do not vomit, try a small amount of food from the *Helpful Foods* list.
- Nibble on dry crackers throughout the day.
- Rinse your mouth frequently to rid your mouth of unpleasant tastes.
- Avoid foods with strong or unpleasant odors (including during cooking).
- Rest often.
- Distract yourself with calm activities, such as reading.
- Try taking a slow walk; the fresh air might decrease your nausea.
- Avoid clothes that press against your stomach and throat areas.
- If you are having difficulty eating or drinking enough to meet your nutritional needs, ask your nurse for a referral to a Roswell Park dietitian, who can work with you to design a food plan that meets your needs.

When Should I Call My Doctor?

If you have nausea and/or vomiting, it is very important to stay hydrated and avoid dehydration. Dehydration can result in kidney failure, neurological symptoms, arthritis, skin problems, confusion,

and disorientation. Severe dehydration leads to changes in your body's chemistry, such as potentially life threatening electrolyte imbalances.

Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following.

- nausea that lasts more than 2 days and is interfering with your daily activities
- severe stomach pain
- blood in your vomit (may appear red or black)
- you cannot keep food, liquid, or anti-nausea medication in your stomach
- vomiting 3 or more times per hour for more than 8 hours, projectile vomiting (vomiting with extreme force), or vomiting with dizziness or confusion
- weight loss of 2lbs or more in 1 day due to vomiting Signs or symptoms of dehydration (excess loss of body fluids):
 - increased thirst
 - dry mucus membranes (dry mouth or nose)
 - thick mucus
 - lack of saliva
 - dry skin
 - skin that “tents” (retains a tent shape after you pinch it up and then let go)
 - weakness
 - lightheadedness (particularly if it gets worse when you stand)
 - dark urine
 - infrequent urination and/or small amounts or no urine when you try to urinate