

Nausea and Vomiting: Ways to Manage

What it is

Nausea is when you feel sick to your stomach, like you are going to throw up. Vomiting is when you throw up. You may also have dry heaves, which is when your body tries to vomit, even though your stomach is empty.

Nausea and vomiting can occur while you are getting chemo (chemotherapy), right after, or many hours or days later. You will most likely feel better on the days you do not get chemo.

Why it happens

Some causes of nausea and vomiting are:

- Certain types of cancer treatment such as chemo, radiation therapy, surgery, targeted therapy and/or immunotherapy
- The cancer itself
- Certain medicines
- Infections or illness

Some chemo can cause nausea, vomiting or both. If needed, your doctor can prescribe medicines to help prevent nausea and vomiting during and after chemo. These are called **antiemetic** or **anti-nausea** drugs. How and when you take them depends on the type of chemo you are getting and how you react to it. Your doctor may prescribe more than one type of drug to help with nausea. Be sure to take these drugs as ordered and let your doctor or nurse know if they do not work.

If you have questions or concerns about treatments to control nausea and vomiting caused by chemo, talk to your doctor or nurse.

If one anti-nausea drug does not work well for you, your doctor can prescribe a different one.



What you can do about nausea and vomiting

- **Do not take medicines on an empty stomach** unless your doctor tells you to do so.
- **Choose bland, easy-to-digest foods and drinks** that do not upset your stomach. These include plain crackers, toast, pretzels, dry cereal, white rice, bananas, applesauce, gelatin, and drinks such as ginger ale. Avoid high fat dairy products because they may make nausea worse.
- **Eat small meals and snacks.** Instead of 3 large meals each day, you might feel better if you eat 5 or 6 small meals and snacks. Do not drink a lot before or during meals. Also, do not lie down right after you eat.
- **Have foods and drinks that are warm or cool (not hot or cold).** Give hot foods and drinks time to cool down, or make them colder by adding ice. You can warm up cold foods by taking them out of the refrigerator 1 hour before you eat or warming them slightly in a microwave. Drink clear soda or ginger ale at room temperature. Let carbonated drinks lose their fizz before you drink them.
- **Stay away from foods and drinks with strong smells.**
- **Get enough fluids to help prevent dehydration.**
Sip on clear fluids throughout the day which include:
 - Water, broth and caffeine-free tea
 - Sports drinks like Gatorade, Powerade, or Propel
 - Fruit juices like apple, cranberry or grape



Try small bites of popsicles or fruit ices. Sucking on ice chips may be helpful.

- **Suck on sugar-free mints or tart candies like sugar-free lemon drops.**
Do not use tart candies if you have mouth or throat sores.
- **Try ginger candies or ginger-root tea.**
- **Relax before treatment.** You may feel less nausea if you relax before your chemo. Meditate, do deep breathing exercises, or imagine scenes or things that make you feel peaceful. You can also do quiet hobbies such as reading, listening to music or knitting.

- **Try an anti-nausea wristband that uses acupressure points to help control motion sickness.**
- **If you feel like throwing up, breathe deeply and slowly or get fresh air.** You might also distract yourself by chatting with friends or family, listening to music, or watching a movie or TV.
- **Talk to your doctor or nurse before trying other treatments.** If you want to try other treatments for nausea and vomiting, such as acupuncture or cannabis, talk with your doctor or nurse first. This is important because things that seem safe may interfere with your cancer treatment.

Let your doctor or nurse know if your medicine for nausea is not working.

Foods that are easy on the stomach

This list may help if you feel queasy or have trouble keeping food down.

Main meals

- Baby food
- Cooked refined cereals such as cream of wheat or cream of rice
- Cottage cheese
- Eggs
- Macaroni and cheese
- Pureed cooked foods
- Soups

Sweets

- Fruit, pureed or baby food
- Gelatin
- Milkshakes, smoothies
- Soft fruits like bananas or peaches
- Yogurt, plain or vanilla

For a more detailed list of foods that are easy on the stomach, see “Eating Hints,” a book from the National Cancer Institute. For a free copy, call our Health Librarian at 216-286-4636 or scan the QR code.



Scan me



Call your doctor or nurse right away if you:

- Have a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher or chills
- Cannot eat, drink or keep liquids down for 12 hours
- Cannot take your anti-nausea medicine or it is not working
- Have stomach pain or swelling
- Have not made urine (pee) for 8 hours or if your urine (pee) is dark yellow
- Throw up within 30 minutes after taking your medicine
- Have back pain or a headache
- Have signs of dehydration such as: feeling dizzy, very tired or weak; like heart is racing or skipping a beat, dry mouth, feeling very thirsty and/or not peeing as often as normal



Call 911 if you:

- Have chest pain or problems breathing
- See red, bloody or brown vomit, or vomit looks like coffee grounds
- Have blurry vision, pass out, or become confused, restless or very sleepy for no reason
- Have forceful (projectile vomiting) or bad stomach pain while throwing up



This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.