Getting Help for Nausea and Vomiting

Nausea is an unpleasant feeling in the back of your throat and stomach that may lead to vomiting. Some other ways people describe nausea are "sick to my stomach," "queasy," or "upset stomach."

People often call vomiting "throwing up." It happens when your stomach muscles squeeze and push the contents of your stomach up through your mouth.

About 8 out of every 10 people treated for cancer have nausea and vomiting. But there are many medicines that work well to control this, and you do not need to suffer.

What causes nausea and vomiting?

Nausea and vomiting in the person with cancer can be caused by many things. Most of the time they are short-term problems and go away when treatment is over. If they last, don't get better with treatment, or make it hard to eat or drink, tell your health care team right away.

Can nausea and vomiting cause problems?

When nausea and vomiting are bad or last a long time, they can make it hard for you to do the things you need to do. They can also make it hard for you to get the cancer treatment you need.

Vomiting can lead to dehydration, which is a lack of fluids and minerals needed by your body. It can also make you feel tired, have trouble thinking, heal slower, lose weight, and not want to eat.

These side effects should be dealt with right away to help you keep up your weight and energy.

How are nausea and vomiting treated?

Drugs used to control nausea are often called anti-nausea/vomiting drugs. You may also hear them called anti-emetics (**an**-tie-eh-**MEH**-tiks). Every person being treated for cancer can, and should, get medicines to prevent nausea and vomiting.

Anti-nausea/vomiting medicines are usually given on a regular schedule or "around the clock." You take them even if you don't feel sick. But sometimes you may take them on an as needed schedule – you take the medicine at the first sign of nausea to keep it from getting worse. Sometimes, 2 or more medicines are used at the same time.

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What you can do if you have nausea or vomiting:

To reduce nausea and vomiting if you are getting chemo or radiation:

- ✔ Make sure you eat on the days you get treatment. Most people find that a light meal or snack before treatment is best.
- ✔ Try foods and drinks that are "easy on the stomach" or made you feel better when you were sick in the past. These are often things like ginger ale, bland foods, sour candy, and dry crackers or toast.
- ✔ Wear loose-fitting clothes.
- ✔ Let your health care team know when anti-nausea/vomiting medicines aren't working. You may have to try a few different medicines to find the ones that work best for you.
- ✔ Limit sounds, sights, and smells that cause nausea and vomiting.
- ✔ Talk to your doctor or nurse about other things you can try, such as hypnosis, biofeedback, or guided imagery.

Things you can do to try to eat as well as possible during treatment:

- ✔ Don't be too hard on yourself if you can't eat. Try to eat small meals or snacks throughout the day rather than 3 large meals.
- ✔ Add extra calories and protein to foods. Nutrition supplements are easy and can help during this time. Try different brands and flavors of supplements to find out which ones taste best and work best for you.
- ✔ Eat the foods that sound good to you.
- ✔ Try food that is cold or at room temperature.
- ✔ Make the most of days when you feel well and want to eat. But listen to your body. Don't force yourself to eat.
- ✔ Ask family and friends for help shopping and cooking.
- ✔ Keep your mouth clean. Brush your teeth and rinse your mouth out every time you vomit.

Eating well is important both during and after treatment. If you have side effects from the anti-nausea/vomiting medicines or they are not working, talk with your health care team.

Talk to your doctor or nurse.

Nausea and vomiting can be side effects of cancer treatment. But they are not a part of cancer treatment that can't be changed. Talk to your health care team if you are having nausea. Be willing to work with them to find the right anti-nausea/vomiting medicines for you.

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