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.

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

Nausea and vomiting can be common side effects for people being treated for cancer. But there are many medicines that work well to control this, and you do not need to suffer.

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. Every person getting cancer treatment that can cause nausea or vomiting, can, and should, get medicines to prevent or control it.

Anti-nausea/vomiting medicines are usually given on a regular schedule or “around the clock.” In this case, 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.
What you can do
To reduce nausea and vomiting if you are getting cancer treatment:

• 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.

Try to eat as well as possible during cancer 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 foods that appeal 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.

Tell your friends or loved ones what they can do to help. Their support and understanding can help you cope better.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and emotional support, call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345 or visit us online at www.cancer.org. We’re here when you need us.