

What to Do 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.

Nausea and vomiting can be common side effects for people being treated for cancer. You don’t need to be concerned. There are many medicines that work well to control them.



What causes nausea and vomiting?

Many things can cause nausea and vomiting in a person with cancer, including:

- Cancer treatment, such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or immunotherapy
- Cancer that affects the brain or abdomen (belly)
- Some medicines, such as those for pain
- Blockage in part of the bowel
- Anxiety
- Dehydration
- Infection

Most of the time, these side effects don’t last long and go away when treatment is over.



Can nausea and vomiting cause other problems?

When nausea and vomiting are bad or last a long time, you may have a hard time doing 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 and to avoid changes in your treatment plan.



How are nausea and vomiting treated?

Medicines used to help prevent or control nausea are often called anti-nausea and vomiting medicines. You may also hear them called antiemetics. Every person getting cancer treatment that can cause nausea and vomiting can and should be treated for these side effects.

Anti-nausea and 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 can you do to help manage nausea and vomiting?

To help 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 cancer care team know when anti-nausea and 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 with your cancer care team about other things you can try, such as hypnosis, biofeedback, or guided imagery.



When to talk with your cancer care team

Nausea and vomiting can be side effects of cancer treatment, but they can usually be controlled. Talk with your cancer care team about what's causing your nausea and vomiting and what you can do about it. Let them know what makes it better or worse. Be willing to work with them to find the right anti-nausea and vomiting medicines for you.

Try to eat as well as possible during and after 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 you like.
- 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 with shopping and cooking.
- Keep your mouth clean. Brush your teeth and rinse your mouth out every time you vomit.

Call your cancer care team right away if you:

- Have side effects from the anti-nausea and vomiting medicines
- Might have inhaled some of your vomit
- Have been vomiting for 2 to 3 days
- Can't keep medicines down
- Can't take in more than 4 cups of liquid or ice chips in a day
- Haven't eaten for more than 2 days
- Lose 2 or more pounds in 1 to 2 days (This means you are losing water quickly and might be getting dehydrated.)
- Have dark yellow urine or don't urinate as often or as much as usual



When to call 911 or go to the ER

Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you:

- Vomit blood or material that looks like coffee grounds
- Become weak, dizzy, or confused



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/nauseavomiting or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

