

Nausea

Tips to Control

Some chemotherapy (chemo) medicines may cause nausea or vomiting. Nausea is the feeling that you are going to throw up. Vomiting is throwing up the contents of your stomach. Nausea is more common than vomiting.

Nausea that happens within 24 hours of receiving chemo is referred to as “acute” nausea. You may have nausea for a few days after chemo is completed. This is referred to as “delayed” nausea. After repeated chemo, some people worry that they will have nausea. They may begin to feel it even before the treatment starts. This is called “anticipatory” nausea.

Not all chemotherapy causes nausea and vomiting. When these side effects are felt, there are medicines and methods to ease symptoms. If you have nausea and vomiting and are having a hard time eating, ask for a consult with a dietitian.

Antiemetics

Antiemetics are medicines that help control nausea and vomiting. Some can be given before chemo to prevent symptoms. Antiemetics may be given by mouth, IV or by other routes.

You may be given an antiemetic to use at home. You may be told to take this medicine on a regular basis or as needed. Some patients are asked to take their antiemetic at home before coming in for chemo.



You may need to try more than one antiemetic before you get relief. Do not give up. **Tell your health care team if your nausea is not controlled.** A custom plan can be designed for you by your health care team. It is normal to take 2 or more medicines to prevent or relieve symptoms.

Prevention

- Ask your health care team which antiemetic will be prescribed to prevent and control nausea and vomiting. Learn about and follow the instructions on when and how to take them.
- Take your nausea medicine as directed at the first sign of symptoms and as needed. **Do not** wait until nausea gets worse before taking medicines.
- Try eating small meals throughout the day rather than eating large meals or skipping meals.
- **Do not** eat heavy, high fat or greasy meals right before chemotherapy.
- Avoid strong or unpleasant smells and the sight of foods that can cause nausea or vomiting.
- Drink enough liquids so that your urine is light colored. Sip on liquids throughout the day. **Do not** drink large amounts at one time.

- Practice good mouth care.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing.
- Avoid exercising right after eating.
- Sit or recline with your head up for at least 30 to 60 minutes after eating.
- Ask for help from family and friends with grocery shopping when possible.

Treatment

- Take your antiemetic(s) as directed.
- Contact your health care team if the symptoms are not controlled with the prescribed medicine or if they prevent you from eating or drinking for more than a day.
- Apply a cool wet cloth to your forehead or neck.
- **Do not** force yourself to eat when you are nauseated. Wait until you feel better before you try to eat.
- Dry foods such as crackers or toast may be better tolerated. Eat dry foods when you first wake up, before you start moving around.
- Move slowly.
- Open a window or use a fan to circulate fresh air.
- Try tart or sour flavored foods, hard candies or liquids.
- Sip room temperature carbonated drinks such as cola or ginger ale throughout the day.
- Eat ice chips made from water, Gatorade®, juices or ginger ale.
- Drink enough liquids so that your urine is light colored.
- Pay attention to which foods trigger or soothe nausea. Do not eat your favorite foods when nauseated. Doing so may cause you to no longer enjoy them later if linked to feeling sick.
- Use distraction such as music, puzzles, games, TV or reading.
- Learn relaxation techniques. Ask your health care team for other treatment options such as acupuncture, complementary therapies or ginger.

When to Call Your Doctor

Tell your health care team if you:

- Have severe nausea or vomiting.
- Are unable to keep food, water or medicine in your stomach for 24 hours or longer.
- Do not pee for 12 hours or more.
- Feel weak, dizzy or confused.