

Nausea and vomiting during cancer treatment

Nausea means feeling sick and vomiting means being sick (throwing up). These symptoms can be caused by certain cancers and some cancer treatments.

If your treatment or cancer is likely to cause nausea and vomiting, your doctor will give you anti-sickness medicine. Make sure you take your anti-sickness medicine as prescribed, even if you don't feel sick. It is a lot easier to prevent nausea and vomiting than to stop it once it starts.

When am I likely to get nausea and vomiting?

Cancer treatments that may cause nausea and vomiting include chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy or radiation therapy.

Nausea and vomiting usually happens in the first few hours to days after treatment.

Some people get nausea and vomiting before their treatment. This can happen because they had nausea and vomiting before, and they are worried that it will happen again.

How can I manage nausea and vomiting?

Your doctor will prescribe medicine for you, to help with nausea and vomiting.

Take this medicine how your doctor tells you to, even if you don't feel sick.

This helps to keep nausea away. It is much easier to stop nausea before it starts.

Dehydration can be very serious.

If you are vomiting, try to drink plenty of water to replace fluids in your body.

Do not do this if you are 'fluid restricted' and not allowed to drink a lot of water. Talk to your doctor about what you should do.

Remember: Take your anti-sickness medicine at the right time (even if you don't feel sick)

Important

Contact your doctor or nurse immediately if you:

- have a temperature of 38°C or higher
- have chills, sweats, shivers or shakes
- are feeling sick and vomiting all the time (can't keep any food or drink down)
- have signs of dehydration

If you can't contact your doctor or nurse, go to the nearest hospital emergency department for help.

What if I keep vomiting?

When you vomit you lose water or fluids (liquids) from your body. If you vomit a lot, you can lose a lot of fluids. This is called *dehydration*.

Signs of dehydration are:

- you feel lightheaded or dizzy or confused
- your heart feels as if it is skipping or going very fast
- you have a severe headache
- your urine (wee) changes, e.g. you don't pass as much as usual, or it is a very dark colour

Things to ask your doctor or nurse

- What problems should I call you about?
- What anti-sickness medicine should I take?
- When should I take it?
- What should I eat and drink?

Contact numbers

Daytime: _____

Night/weekend: _____

What else can I do for nausea and vomiting?

- Ask to see a dietitian who can help you with your diet.
- If you feel anxious, try things to help you relax, such as yoga, meditation or breathing exercises.
- Acupuncture or acupressure bands on your wrists (used for travel sickness).
- If you have nausea and vomiting that is hard to control your doctor may prescribe you medicinal cannabis.

Chemotherapy safety at home

Body fluids are liquids in the body. They include blood, urine (wee), faeces (poo), mucous (phlegm), saliva (spit), and vomit. Most chemotherapy medicines remain in body fluids for about 48 hours after each treatment, but some can stay there for up to seven days.

Chemotherapy medicines can be harmful to healthy people so it is important to clean up any body fluids correctly.

What to do

- Wear disposable gloves and use paper towels to soak up any body fluids or spills.
- Use disposable cloths and soapy water to wash down surfaces body fluids have been on, and dry with paper towels.
- Put the used paper towels, cloths and gloves in a plastic bag and put it in the rubbish, then wash your hands with soap and water.
- Wash any clothing or sheets with body fluids on them straight away. Use the longest washing machine cycle in either hot or cold water. Run the wash cycle twice.
- If you vomit into a bowl, wear disposable gloves to empty into the toilet, wash the bowl with soapy water and dry with paper towels. Don't use it for anything else and throw it away at the end of your treatment.

Eating

- eat small meals 5 or 6 times a day
- eat slowly and chew your food well
- eat cold or warm food (not hot)
- don't cook meals when you feel sick
- let someone else do the cooking
- don't eat very sweet, fried, fatty or spicy foods, or foods with a strong smell
- try peppermints or peppermint tea
- try foods with ginger in them, e.g. ginger biscuits or ginger beer

Drinking

- **have plenty of water during the day (unless you are fluid restricted)**
- **drink water slowly in small sips**
- **don't drink a lot before meals**
- **don't drink alcohol**
- **don't have drinks with caffeine in them**

Common questions

Why do some people get nausea and vomiting and others don't?

There are many chemotherapy medicines and some of them make people sick more than others. Also, some people get sick more easily, e.g. people who get travel sickness or have anxiety.

Should I eat when I feel sick?

Sometimes having an empty stomach can make feeling sick feel worse. If you feel sick but haven't eaten anything you could try some dry crackers or a piece of toast.

What if I get nausea a lot?

If your nausea stops you from doing important or enjoyable things, talk to your doctor or nurse. They may be able to change your anti-sickness medicines.



For information for patient and carers please scan the QR code.