

How to Manage your Nausea and Vomiting

What is nausea and vomiting?

Nausea is an unpleasant feeling in the back of your throat and stomach. It can make you have more saliva, clammy skin or a fast heart rate. It can make you feel light-headed, sick to your stomach, queasy or like you have 'butterflies' in your stomach. Vomiting is "throwing-up" the stomach contents through the mouth. Vomiting may or may not happen with nausea. When your stomach is empty you may have gagging or "dry heaves".

What causes nausea and vomiting?

They may be caused by:

- Cancer itself
- Medications
- Cancer treatments (like chemotherapy or radiation)
- Constipation
- Infection
- Anxiety
- Other medical problems
- Pain
- Headache
- History of nausea and vomiting

What can I do to manage my nausea and vomiting?

Take anti-nausea medications

It is easier to prevent nausea with medications than it is to treat it once it starts. If your health care team prescribes anti-nausea medications it is important that you take them. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse about when and how to take your anti-nausea medications.

Drink well

Sip small amounts of cool liquids often during the day. Drink liquids and eat foods separately, at least 30 minutes apart.

Eat well

- Eat small amounts every 2-3 hours. Many small meals can be better than 3 larger meals.
- Wear loose clothing. Relax and take your time while eating. Sit in an upright position for 30-60 minutes after eating.
- Brush your teeth 30 minutes after eating and before bed to help remove tastes from your mouth that make you feel sick to your stomach.
- Suck on hard candies to get rid of bad tastes in your mouth.

Use complementary therapies

Some patients find that complementary therapies (e.g., acupressure, visualization) help their nausea and vomiting.

What should I drink to help ease my nausea and vomiting?

- Water, watered down juice or sports drinks, flat ginger ale, lemonade, broths and non-creamy soups
- Suck on ice chips, popsicles or frozen fruit
- Limit caffeine, including coffee and caffeinated soft drinks (cola), and alcohol

What should I eat to help ease my nausea and vomiting?

- First try foods that are easier to eat (e.g., crackers, dry toast, noodles, Jello, rice) **Tip: Keep crackers at your bedside to eat before getting up**
- If you feel better, add more food (e.g., light soup, lean meat, poultry and fish, skim or 1% milk, low fat yogurt, cheese, fruit and vegetables)

- Limit:
- Greasy and fried meat
 - Sour cream, onion, garlic
 - Eggs
 - Doughnuts, pastries, sweet dessert
 - Fatty luncheon meats
 - Very spicy food
 - Gravy, rich sauces, cream

What should I do if I vomit?

Rinse your mouth with a bland rinse after vomiting to help keep it clean. Stop eating and drinking for 30-60 minutes. Then start slowly with these foods in this order:

1. Clear liquids (like water, ice chips, watered down juice, broth, gelatin, popsicles)
2. Dry starchy food (like crackers, dry toast)
3. Protein rich foods (like chicken, fish, eggs)
4. Dairy foods (like yogurt, milk, cheese)

Bland Rinse Recipe

Mix together:
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
4 cups water

If you vomit in between your regular anti-nausea medication doses, take your “as needed” anti-nausea medication. Wait 30-60 minutes. Then try drinking liquids and continue with steps 2 to 4.

What if the smell of food or drinks bothers you?

- Drink liquids through a straw to avoid their smell.
- Eat cold or room temperature foods. They do not smell as strong as hot foods.
- Open a window or use a fan to get rid of food smells in the room.
- If possible, stay out of the kitchen. Ask someone else to prepare meals or buy prepared meals.
- Get some fresh air.

When should I talk to my health care team?

Tell your health care team how you are feeling at every appointment. They want to know about your nausea and vomiting. Do not be afraid to ask about your questions and concerns.

Tell your health care team right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- You are not able to keep any water, food or pills in your stomach.
- You have severe nausea that lasts for more than 24 hours.
- You are weak, dizzy and confused.

For more information, talk to your health care team, ask to meet with a registered dietitian or visit www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms.

