

Cancer Treatment Side Effects: Nausea and Vomiting

Nausea and vomiting is the term for feeling sick to your stomach and throwing up. It is one of the most feared side effects or symptoms associated with cancer and its treatment. Luckily, with the proper use of a variety of medicines and other methods, it can be well controlled or prevented.

It is very important to understand the possible causes of nausea and vomiting. Sometimes the cancer itself or the treatment (chemotherapy or radiation therapy) may cause a person to be sick. Other medicines, like pain pills and antibiotics, can further add to the problem. Anxiety can also make nausea and vomiting worse.

The following suggestions may help prevent nausea and vomiting, or relieve it if it happens:

- Take an anti-nausea medicine before chemotherapy and afterwards. (Preventing it from starting is the key to control.) The medicine can come in the form of a pill, rectal suppository, intravenous (by vein) injection, or injection into the muscle. Be sure to take these regularly, as directed. In some cases, you may be directed to take anti-nausea medicine for a few days after chemotherapy. (It depends on the type of chemotherapy you are receiving.)
- Eat lightly before and during chemotherapy.
- It is important to get enough fluids because dehydration can increase nausea. Start with clear liquids like Jell-O™, Italian Ice, broth, sorbet, clear juice, or 7-Up™.
- Try to keep a small amount of food in your stomach at all times. Nausea is more likely to occur on an empty stomach.
- Choose 'comfort foods' like tea, dry toast, bland foods, soups, broths, or crackers.
- If you become sick after eating, avoid your favorite foods if you think it will be difficult to enjoy these foods again later.
- Rest after meals; keep your head elevated to help keep food from coming up.
- Avoid strong odors. Cold foods may be more appealing than hot ones, since heating increases smells from food and can trigger nausea.

- Relaxation or visualization tapes, or music therapy can help distract thoughts or anxiety about nausea and vomiting.
- Some people find that a little ginger tea helps to control their nausea.
- Acupuncture is helpful for some patients.
- If vomiting occurs and is severe, restrict your diet to small sips of clear liquids until the nausea and vomiting are better controlled. Try not to get too discouraged. If you vomit more than one hour after eating, about half of what you ate will have already moved past your stomach.

Call Your Nurse or Physician if Any of the Following Occurs

- You have nausea and vomiting that lasts greater than 24 hours and you are unable to keep any food, liquids, or medicines down.
- Call your physician, nurse, or pharmacist if you develop any of the following side effects that may come from the anti-nausea medication: drowsiness, restlessness, jitters, anxiety, or stiff neck. A number of anti-nausea medications are available so other medications may be substituted as needed.

Remember: Nausea and vomiting can be prevented or controlled. There are several different kinds of medications that can be tried. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or dietitian about your options.

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