

Physical Concerns – Nausea or Vomiting

Internet version of this handout with active resource links at: cancer-help.me/nausea-vomiting

Nausea is that feeling you have when you are going to throw up. You feel sick to your stomach and may not know how to describe the feeling. Vomiting (emesis) is throwing up what is in your stomach. It usually comes out of your mouth and can also come out through your nose.

Many types of chemotherapy may cause mild to severe nausea and vomiting. Radiation therapy, especially to the brain, spinal cord, abdomen, and pelvis, may also cause nausea and vomiting.

Relieving side effects is an important part of cancer care and treatment. This is called symptom management or palliative care. Talk with your health care team about any symptoms you experience and any change in symptoms.

What are the risks of nausea and vomiting?

Mild nausea and vomiting can be uncomfortable. Usually it does not cause serious problems. Vomiting a lot and often is a problem. It can cause dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, weight loss, and depression. Severe vomiting can reopen surgical wounds, create tears in the esophagus (the tube through which food passes from the throat to the stomach), or break bones. This may result in the need to stop cancer treatment, for some people.

It is important to tell your health care team if you experience nausea or vomiting so they can help you prevent or manage it.

How are nausea and vomiting prevented and treated?

Nausea and vomiting can be prevented with medications. However, some patients may still have nausea even if they are not vomiting. Medications to prevent nausea and vomiting should be taken as prescribed, even after treatment, because the risk of vomiting can continue for several days after treatment. If you have nausea and vomiting even if you are taking your medication as prescribed, tell your health care team. They can recommend other medications.

Other options, such as distraction, relaxation, positive imagery, and acupuncture, may help. Some herbal medications, like ginger, may help with nausea. However, you should discuss your plans with your health care team before starting any of these other options.

What if nausea and vomiting don't stop or get worse?

If your nausea and vomiting does not stop or gets worse, talk with your health care team. The cause may need to be identified. If you cannot keep food or water in your body because of severe nausea and vomiting, it can lead to serious dehydration and electrolyte imbalance. Dehydration can lead to other health problems.

It is important to talk to your health care team if your symptoms get worse.

Adapted from: https://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_nausea_vomiting.pdf & [NCCN Guidelines for Patients®, Nausea and Vomiting](#)

Resources for Additional Information:

- [NCCN Guidelines for Patients®, Nausea and Vomiting](#)
- [ASCO answers, Nausea and Vomiting](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Nausea and Vomiting](#)
- [NIH, NCI Nausea and Vomiting Related to Cancer Treatment \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [Chemocare, Nausea, Vomiting & Chemotherapy](#)
- [American Cancer Society Nausea and Vomiting](#)
- [American Cancer Society Anti-nausea/vomiting medicines](#)
- [American Cancer Society Other treatments for nausea and vomiting](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Chemotherapy-Induced Nausea and Vomiting \(CINV\)](#)

Información Española

- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Náuseas y vómitos](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Náuseas y vómitos](#)
- [Chemocare, Acidez Estomacal \(reflujo gástrico\) y Quimioterapia](#)
- [Chemocare, Náuseas, vómitos y quimioterapia](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Náuseas y vómitos](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Consejos para controlar las náuseas y aumentar el apetito durante el tratamiento del cáncer](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Náuseas y vómitos inducidos por la quimioterapia](#)