

Nausea Management

Nausea (feeling queasy or sick to your stomach) and/or vomiting (throwing up) can be a common side effect of surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy. The disease itself, or other conditions unrelated to your cancer or treatment, may also cause nausea.

There are many new drugs available to prevent or lessen this side effect. Different techniques work for different people, and you may need to experiment to find out what works for you. Here are some suggestions that you can try at home that may help.

When to call your doctor

- If you continue to suffer from nausea and vomiting despite taking your anti-nausea medications as directed.
- Vomiting 4-5 times in a 24 hour period.
- You cannot keep any liquids or food down for more than a few hours

Medication management of nausea

- Do not wait until you are throwing up to take your nausea medications. They will be more effective if you take them as soon as you are starting to feel nausea, or around-the-clock (such as taking a scheduled dose every 6 hours) as directed by your doctor or nurse
- If you are taking your nausea medication as often as prescribed and you are still nauseous after 24 hours, call your doctor's office. It may take trying a couple of different medications or combinations before finding the right match for you.

Other tips

- Avoid strong odors in food or in your environment
- Eat small amounts of bland food frequently throughout the day
- Wear loose-fitting clothing
- Avoid caffeine and smoking

Plan ahead

- Keep foods handy that need little or no preparation, such as pudding, peanut butter, tuna fish, cheese, and eggs.
- When you are feeling well, shop in advance of chemotherapy and stock up on foods you know you can eat when you're not feeling well. Do some cooking in advance and freeze in meal-sized portions.
- Talk to friends and family members about helping with shopping and cooking.

What to do if you vomit

- If you vomit, do not eat or drink until you have the nausea under control
- Once it is under control try small amounts of clear liquids. Begin with 1 teaspoonful every 10 minutes, gradually increasing the amount to 1 tablespoon every 20 minutes, then 2 tablespoons every 30 minutes.
- When you are able to keep down clear liquids, try a full-liquid (fluids that are opaque, such as soups, milk) or a soft diet, gradually working up to your regular diet.

Nausea and Diet

If you do not have nausea, you do not have to restrict your diet. The following suggestions are to try when you may have a mild or intermittent nausea but you feel ready to try eating.

Foods to look for or avoid

- Look for foods that are light or white in color, these types of foods are often fall into the category of foods that are bland and easy to digest.
- Try eating foods and drinks that were easy for you to take when you were nauseated from the flu, morning sickness, or motion sickness. These might be bland foods, sour candy, pickles, dry crackers, ginger ale, flat soda, or others.
- If you are not eating much, try to eat meals and snacks with sufficient protein and calories, and/or consider supplementing your diet with liquid meal replacements like Boost or Ensure, available in most grocery stores.
- Avoid heavy, high fat, greasy, spicy, or foods with a strong odor.

Other eating hints

- Eat small amounts of food throughout the day instead of large meals.
- Eat before you get too hungry because hunger can make feelings of nausea stronger.
- If nausea is a problem in the morning, eat dry foods such as dry cereal, toast, or crackers without liquids before getting up
- Eat foods that are cool or room temperature, as hot foods emit a stronger odor that may increase your nausea.
- Chew your food well for easier digestion
- Rest after meals, because activity may slow digestion. Don't lay flat, rest by sitting up or reclining about two hours after eating.
- Many people find their appetite is better in the morning. Take advantage of this and eat more then.

Drink plenty of fluids

- Slowly drink or sip liquids throughout the day like water and juices. Many persons on chemotherapy need to drink at least 6-8 cups of fluid per day. Try carrying a water bottle with you during the day.
- Avoid drinking liquids at meals to prevent a full, bloated feeling.
- Try drinking cool, clear, unsweetened fruit juices or light-colored sodas such as ginger ale that have lost their fizz and do not have caffeine

Examples of bland foods that are easy on the stomach

- Toast, crackers, pretzels
- Cream of wheat, rice, or oatmeal
- Skinless chicken that is baked or broiled
- Canned peaches, bananas, or other soft, bland fruits and vegetables
- Yogurt, pudding
- Angel food cake
- Boiled potatoes, rice, or noodles