

Nausea and Vomiting

What are nausea and vomiting?

Nausea is when you feel queasy or sick to your stomach. Vomiting is when you throw up.

You can have nausea without vomiting or you may have nausea and vomiting together.

What causes nausea and vomiting?

Cancer and cancer treatments can cause nausea and vomiting. Constipation can also sometimes cause nausea.

You may also have nausea or vomiting when you first start taking pain medications like opioids. You may feel like this for a short time while your body becomes used to the new medication.

When should I talk to my health care team?

If you have nausea or vomiting, tell your health care team. They will work with you to treat them.

Tell your health care team if you have nausea for more than 3 days or if your nausea keeps you from doing things that are important to you.

Call your health care team right away if:

- You vomit more than two times per day.
- You keep vomiting your food, fluids or medications.
- Your urine (“pee”) is dark yellow and you are not going to the bathroom as often as you usually do
- You feel dizzy or confused.
- The stuff you vomit looks like coffee grounds (this might be blood).



What are the treatments for nausea and vomiting?

If your chemotherapy may cause nausea, your health care team will give you anti-nausea medications to take. These medications will prevent or reduce nausea after chemotherapy treatments. Your health care team will tell you when to take these medications.

Some things to know about anti-nausea medications:

- There are many medications to control nausea and vomiting. Your health care team will give you the medications.
- Make sure you fill all of your anti-nausea medication prescriptions.
- Take the anti-nausea medications as your health care team has told you to.
- You may need to pay for your anti-nausea medications. If you cannot afford to pay for them, tell your health care team.

- There is help available if you cannot pay: www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/practical-support
- If you are not sure what financial assistance programs you qualify for, call your Cancer Centre's Patient & Family Counselling Services to make an appointment with a counsellor.

Tell your health care team if:

- Your pharmacy does not have the medications you need.
- You are not sure how to take your anti-nausea medications.
- You are vomiting and cannot take the medications.
- Your anti-nausea medications are helping but not as much as you would like. You may need a different dose or a different medication.

What can I do for myself?

Nausea and vomiting can be very unpleasant. You may not want or be able to do the things that are important to you. Also, if you vomit a lot, your body may lose too much fluid and get dehydrated.

Only you know how sick you feel and if you need help. Please talk with your health care team about how you are feeling.

Here are some things that may help when you have nausea and vomiting:

Food and drink

- Write down all of the things that give you nausea or make you vomit.
- Eat and drink what works for you. Try foods that have made you feel better in the past. These might be bland foods, sour candy, dry crackers, toast, ginger ale, flat soda, or others.

- Do not eat your favorite foods when you have nausea and vomiting. You may start to dislike them when you are feeling well.
- Try eating small meals more often instead of three large meals a day.
- Sip fluids often during the day. Fluids such as water, juice, soups, broths, sports drinks, herbal tea or nutritional drinks such as Ensure®.
- Try chewing food slowly and well.
- Eat foods that are lukewarm or cold. The smell of hot foods may make your nausea worse.
- Do not eat fatty, fried, very spicy, or very sweet foods.

If you are not sure what fluids to drink or foods to eat, talk to your health care team.

You can also speak with a BC Cancer Dietitian or call 8-1-1 and ask to speak with an oncology dietitian.

Cooking

- If you can, have someone else make your meals so you do not have to smell the food cooking.
- Cook and freeze some meals ahead of time. This way you can reheat them during the times you have nausea.

Keeping your mouth clean

- If your mouth is not clean, bacteria can build up and give you nausea. Brush your teeth at least twice a day.

Relaxation exercises

- Ask your health care team about relaxation exercises. These might help you feel less nervous, more in control, and lower your nausea.

Complementary therapies

- Some complementary therapies such as cannabinoids and acupuncture (or acupressure) have been shown to be helpful for some people.

- Complementary therapies may help your nausea and vomiting, but are unlikely to replace your anti-nausea medications.
- Talk to your health care team about any complementary therapies you are interested in.

Where can I learn more?

- BC Cancer Library Nausea and Vomiting pathfinder: bccancer.libguides.com/pathfinder-nausea
- BC Cancer Nutrition Handout “Practical Tips to Help Manage Nausea”:
www.bccancer.bc.ca/nutrition-site/Documents/Patient%20Education/Practical-tps-to-help-manage-nausea.pdf
- BC Cancer Supportive Care Services:
www.bccancer.bc.ca/supportivecare
- BC Cancer Medical Cannabis Handout:
www.bccancer.bc.ca/coping-and-support-site/Documents/MedicalCannabis/BCCancerMedicalCannabisFactSheet.pdf
- Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre – Acupressure for Nausea and Vomiting:
www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/acupressure-nausea-and-vomiting

