



# Nausea & Vomiting

**Nausea** is when you feel sick to your stomach like you are going to throw up.

**Vomiting** is when you throw up.

Nausea and sometimes vomiting are very common symptoms when fighting cancer and undergoing treatment.

## What causes nausea and vomiting during cancer treatment?

There are many causes for nausea and vomiting including:

- Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation
  - Ask your treatment team if your specific therapy usually causes this side effect.
- Pain medications
- Constipation
- Anxiety and emotional stress
- Reduced fluid intake also known as dehydration

## What is the treatment for nausea and vomiting?

The best way to control nausea and vomiting is through **Prevention** and **Communication** with your care team. Your care team will include nausea-preventing medications with your treatment regimen. These include pre-medications such as:

- Aprepitant or Fosaprepitant (Emend®)
- Steroids, usually Dexamethasone (Decadron®)

Your care team may also prescribe medications that you will take at home, either to prevent nausea and vomiting or take as needed. These medications may include:

- Ondansetron (Zofran®)
- Prochlorperazine (Compazine®)
- Lorazepam (Ativan®)
- Steroids: Including Prednisone and Dexamethasone
- Olanzapine (Zyprexa®)

There are many regimens and strategies to help with your nausea and vomiting. We encourage you to talk with your care team to fine-tune a strategy that works best for you. Ask questions and look at your treatment plan to see which medications you will receive before and during treatment. Also ask which medications are provided for use at home, specifically to help with nausea and vomiting.

**Example for effective treatment of medication to prevent and treat nausea and vomiting.**

The following is a commonly used example of how the proper use of medications and communication with your care team can help with your symptoms of nausea and vomiting.

John is being treated with a cancer therapy that is causing him to have a lot of nausea and vomiting. John receives Dexamethasone (as a preventive) along with his chemotherapy. John realizes that three to five days after treatment, his symptoms are so bad and they are not controlled by his “as needed” Ondansetron (Zofran®) and Prochlorperazine (Compazine®) at home. He lets his treatment team know that taking Lorazepam (Ativan®) is best at relieving his symptoms. He and his care team develop the following plan:

- On days 3-5 John will take a scheduled dose of Ondansetron (Zofran®) every 6 hours.
- If the above does not work, John will alternate Ondansetron (Zofran®) with Prochlorperazine (Compazine®) every 4 hours. (If one medication works better than another, he will contact his health care team for more specific directions).
- If John's symptoms do not respond to either of the above, he will take Lorazepam (Ativan®) on an as needed basis every 4-6 hours, especially, at night.

This is just one example of how a symptom management plan can be designed specifically for you.

#### **Tips for success**

- Work to identify which medicines **Do** and **Do Not** work for you and communicate with your care team.
- If you have nausea and vomiting due to taking pain medications, discuss this with your team.
- Constipation is a common side effect of cancer treatment and even nausea medications. Discuss how you can prevent and relieve constipation with your care team.
- If you notice that particular foods such as greasy, fried, salty, sweet or spicy foods bring on or worsen your nausea, you may want to avoid these foods. Plain foods such as clear broths and liquids, rice, toast, cereal, and simple fruits such as bananas and peaches may be helpful.

## When do I need to call my care team?

Call us if the following occurs:

- You are unable to drink 8-10 cups of liquid per day. This may be an emergent situation.
- The nausea and vomiting treatment regimen is not working. There is no need to try and 'tough it out' alone.
- You experience significant side effects from your nausea medications such as:
  - Constipation
  - Inability to urinate
  - Significant change in sleepiness
  - Bothersome changes you think may be from your medications

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Author: Tyler H. Buckley, MD

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