

Nausea and Vomiting with Cancer Treatment

What is nausea and vomiting?

Nausea and vomiting may be common symptoms when you are getting treatment for cancer.

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

What causes nausea and vomiting during cancer treatment?

There are many different causes of 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.
- Not getting enough fluids (dehydration).

What is the treatment for nausea and vomiting?

Prevention and communication with your care team is the best way to control nausea and vomiting. Your care team will include medications to prevent nausea with your treatment plan. These include pre-treatment medications such as:

- Ondansetron (Zofran®) or palonosetron (Aloxi®)
- Aprepitant (Cinvanti®) 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 to take as needed if you experience nausea and vomiting. These medications may include:

- Ondansetron (Zofran®)
- Prochlorperazine (Compazine®)
- Lorazepam (Ativan®)
- Steroids, including prednisone and dexamethasone
- Olanzapine (Zyprexa®)

What are some other ways to prevent or treat nausea and vomiting?

- Drink water or clear fluids to stay well hydrated.
 - You can sip on water, broth, tea, fruit juice, ginger ale, or a sports drink throughout the day.
- Eat smaller meals more often throughout the day (rather than 2 or 3 large meals).
- Try to eat foods that are easier on your stomach, such as bland food or high starch foods (like rice, pasta, toast, crackers, pretzels, etc.) or cold foods (popsicles, yogurt, pudding, etc.).
- Avoid foods that may cause stomach issues, such as highly spiced food or fried or high fat foods.
- Maintain a calm, peaceful environment when eating and stay sitting or standing upright for at least 30 minutes after eating.

There are many strategies to help with your nausea and vomiting. We encourage you to talk with your care team to figure out 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 you to use at home, specifically to help with nausea and vomiting.

Can you provide an example of an effective treatment plan 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:

Let's say there is a patient, John, who is being treated with a cancer therapy that is causing him to have a lot of nausea and vomiting. John realizes that 3-5 days after treatment, his symptoms are very bad and not controlled by his "as needed" ondansetron (Zofran®) and prochlorperazine (Compazine®) at home. He shares this with his care team and together they develop the following plan:

- On days 3-5, John will take a scheduled dose of olanzapine (Zyprexa®) at bedtime.
- If this does not work, John will alternate taking ondansetron (Zofran®) with prochlorperazine (Compazine®) every 4 hours. If he notices that one medication works better than another, he will contact his health care team for more specific directions.
- If John's symptoms do not improve after this, he will take lorazepam (Ativan®) as needed every 4-6 hours, especially at night.

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

What are some other tips for success and suggestions?

- Take one of your anti-nausea medications as soon as you begin experiencing nausea at home (before the nausea prevents you from being able to take and hold down the pill).
- Work to identify which medications do and do not work for you, and share that information with your care team.

- If you have nausea and vomiting caused by your pain medications, discuss this with your team.
- Constipation is a common side effect of cancer treatment and even nausea medications. Talk with your care team about how you can prevent and relieve constipation.

When do I need to call my care team?

Call us if:

- You are unable to drink 8-10 cups of liquid per day. This may be an urgent or emergency situation.
- The nausea and vomiting treatment plan is not working, or if you are unable to take your anti-nausea medication because of ongoing nausea or vomiting. There is no need to try and “tough it out” alone.
- You experience significant side effects from your nausea medications, such as:
 - Constipation for 3 days.
 - Not being able to pee for 8 hours.
 - Feeling very sleepy all the time.
 - Other concerning changes that you think may be from your medications.

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