

Many cancer treatments can cause nausea and vomiting. Nausea, also called feeling “queasy” or “sick to your stomach,” is that unpleasant feeling you have when you are going to throw up. Vomiting is throwing up what is inside your stomach through the mouth. Nausea and vomiting can happen together, or one can occur without the other. Relieving side effects, called palliative (supportive) care, is an important part of cancer treatment.

The severity of nausea and vomiting varies among patients. Sometimes these side effects improve as you adjust to treatment, and most side effects go away after treatment ends.

Tell your healthcare team if you experience new or worsening nausea or vomiting. Do not take over-the-counter medications without talking to your doctor. If you experience uncontrolled vomiting, tell your healthcare team immediately.

NUTRITION AND HYDRATION

Nausea and vomiting can make it difficult for you to eat or drink, which increases the risk of malnutrition and dehydration. Malnutrition occurs when a person does not eat or absorb enough calories or key nutrients needed for healthy body function. Dehydration happens when a person does not drink or absorb enough liquids for healthy body function. Cancer patients who are malnourished or dehydrated are at greater risk for health complications, hospitalization, infections, loss of muscle strength, and poor quality of life. Malnourished patients may need to delay, change or stop cancer treatment.

Any side effect that can make eating or drinking difficult increases the risk for health complications and poor quality of life. Visit www.LLS.org/booklets (filter by Side Effect Management) to view the full *Side-Effect Management* series.

MEDICATION TO RELIEVE NAUSEA AND VOMITING

Your healthcare team can provide medications to reduce or even prevent nausea and vomiting. A medication that prevents or reduces nausea and vomiting is called an “antiemetic.” A combination of medications usually works best. If you are in the hospital, medications are often given intravenously. You may also be given or prescribed pills that you will take at home.

Once nausea and vomiting start, the condition can get worse and be hard to stop, so it is important to prevent nausea and vomiting. Even on days when you feel well, you may need to continue taking your anti-nausea medication. If you do not feel nauseated, it is because the medicine is working.

On the other hand, if your medication is not working well, tell your healthcare team. Your doctor may have to adjust the dose or prescribe a different medicine that may work better for you. You might have to try different drugs to find which is most helpful. Do not take any medications or change how you take prescribed medications without first talking to your doctor.

TIPS TO MANAGE NAUSEA AND VOMITING

In addition to taking medication, the following tips may help you prevent or control nausea and vomiting:

- Eat small meals throughout the day.
- Eat dry, bland foods such as crackers, toast, cereal or pretzels.
- Avoid foods that may trigger nausea, such as fried foods, spicy food and strong-smelling food.
- If the smell of food bothers you, ask others to make your food. Try cold foods that do not have strong smells, or let food cool down before you eat it.
- Try products that contain the spice ginger (such as ginger ale, ginger gum or ginger tea). Some people find ginger products help relieve nausea.
- Drink plenty of water and fluids. If you vomit, try sipping water, ginger ale or sports drinks to stay hydrated. It may help to drink small amounts throughout the day, rather than larger amounts less frequently.
- Stay sitting up after meals.
- Avoid skipping meals. An empty stomach can make nausea worse.
- Keep odors to a minimum. Do not use air fresheners or perfumes if these scents trigger nausea. When cooking, use a fan to remove food smells from the room.
- Dim lighting and cooler temperatures may help with nausea.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing.
- Ask your doctor about complementary therapies that may help relieve your nausea. Some patients find acupuncture, therapeutic massage, deep breathing, hypnosis, meditation and other relaxation techniques help relieve nausea. Ask your healthcare team before trying these therapies.

- If you vomit soon after taking a medication, call your doctor or pharmacist for instructions.
- Anyone who cleans up vomit should wear disposable gloves to protect from exposure to cancer drugs.

TRACKING SIDE EFFECTS

Certain foods, medications or activities may trigger or make your nausea and vomiting worse. Tracking your daily health and habits in a journal or app on your phone may help you and your doctor discover what triggers your nausea and vomiting.

With the LLS Health Manager™ mobile app, you can use your phone to track side effects, medication, food and hydration. You can also set up reminders to take medications and to eat and drink water throughout the day. Share this information with your doctor, to identify patterns and develop strategies to help manage your nausea and vomiting. **Visit www.LLS.org/HealthManager to download the LLS Health Manager™ mobile app.**

SEVERE SIDE EFFECTS

Call your healthcare team immediately if you experience any of the following:

- Fever of 100.4°F or higher
- Nausea and/or vomiting accompanied by abdominal pain or a severe headache
- Vomiting blood (which may look like coffee grounds)
- Inability to keep down your medication
- Vomiting for more than two days
- Signs or symptoms of dehydration (dark urine, small amounts of urine, excessive thirst, dry mouth, rapid pulse, headaches, dizziness and confusion)

Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Team

- **Is my cancer treatment likely to cause nausea and vomiting?**
- **How can I prevent nausea and vomiting?**
- **Are there medications I can take for nausea and vomiting?**
- **If I vomit soon after taking medication, what should I do? Who do I call?**
- **What can I eat or drink to help with nausea and vomiting?**
- **Can I be referred to a registered dietitian or nutritionist?**
- **Can I be referred to palliative (supportive) care for help managing my side effects?**
- **Are there any complementary therapies that may help?**
- **What signs or symptoms require a trip to the emergency room?**

GET ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's **Information Specialists**, master's level oncology social workers and health educators, can provide information and support and connect you to our **Clinical Trial Support Center** and **Registered Dietitians**.

- Call **800.955.4572** Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (ET)
- Visit **www.LLS.org/PatientSupport**

Acknowledgement

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