

Chemotherapy-related nausea and vomiting

Here's what you can do



As you've probably heard, chemotherapy ("chemo") can cause nausea and vomiting. These effects are temporary and there is often a way to control them. Here are some tips to help you.

What is the difference between vomiting and nausea?

Vomiting is the action of expelling the contents of your stomach through your mouth.

Nausea is when you feel "sick to your stomach" – in other words, having an unpleasant feeling in your stomach area that makes you feel you're going to vomit. Most of the time, nausea does not lead to vomiting.

When are nausea and vomiting likely to happen?

Most often, nausea and vomiting begin the evening or next day after a chemo treatment.

Sometimes nausea begins before a chemo treatment. This is called "anticipatory nausea." It may be caused by the stress and worry of knowing that the treatments are starting soon.

How long do these effects last?

Nausea can last from 2 to 3 days. Vomiting rarely lasts longer than 24 hours.



What causes nausea and vomiting?

There are several factors that may cause nausea and vomiting:

- the cancer itself
- chemo treatments
- anxiety and stress
- constipation
- other medication that needs to be taken



DID YOU KNOW?

Not everyone who has chemo treatments will have nausea and vomiting. Everyone reacts in a different way.

What's the best way to reduce nausea and vomiting?

The most effective method is to take anti-nausea medication, which works best if you take the drug **as soon as you start to feel uncomfortable**. Make sure you take the medication as prescribed, and follow the instructions your pharmacist gives you.

If you have nausea before the treatments, tell a member of your care team. They can suggest a medication you can take a few minutes before each treatment.

What are some other ways of reducing nausea and vomiting?

- > Eat smaller, more frequent meals.
- > Eat slowly.
- > Eat dry crackers or biscuits.
- > Drink water or other non-alcoholic beverages regularly, but not while you eat.
- > Remain seated for 30 to 60 minutes after each meal.
- > Eat cold or room-temperature food instead of hot food.
- > Brush your teeth regularly, using a toothbrush with flexible bristles.
- > Consider having complementary treatments, such as acupuncture, music therapy, visualization and relaxation.



Avoid the following kinds of food as much as possible:

- very fatty (fried) or very sweet food
- spicy food
- food with a strong odour

Try to distract yourself during the treatments. Bring a book to read or music to listen to. Ask a friend to come along. There will also be volunteers at the clinic.



Once your appetite returns, eat a healthy meal. That's the best way to get your strength back.

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

What signs and symptoms should I watch for?

Call a member of your care team right away if:

- you're still having waves of nausea after 3 days, even while taking your medication
- your vomiting lasts longer than 24 hours, even while taking your medication
- you haven't been able to drink or eat for 24 hours

If this happens, you may have to switch to a different medication. If you can't reach a member of your care team, go to the nearest hospital emergency room.

Where should I go for help or answers to my questions?

If you have questions, feel free to contact a member of your care team.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Canadian Cancer Society:
> **1 888 939-3333**
> **cancer.ca**

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site
chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante



Questions

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