Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Managing Nausea and Vomiting

This information will help you manage nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up) and vomiting (throwing up).

About Nausea and Vomiting

Many people have nausea and vomiting while they're getting chemotherapy or radiation. This can be caused by:

- Chemotherapy medications that affect the areas of your brain that control nausea
- Chemotherapy medications that irritate the lining of your mouth, throat, stomach, or intestines
- Radiation therapy or the combination of chemotherapy and radiation therapy
- Stress
- The thought of having chemotherapy

You may have nausea and vomiting:

- Before your chemotherapy treatment
- Within 24 hours following your chemotherapy treatment or radiation treatment
- After 24 hours following your chemotherapy treatment or radiation treatment
- After you have taken medication to prevent it

It’s important to manage your nausea and vomiting so you can eat and drink. If you don’t eat or drink enough, your body won’t get the vitamins and nutrients it needs to have energy and to heal.

How to Manage Nausea and Vomiting

Take medication

Your healthcare provider may give you medication to help prevent or control nausea and vomiting. If they do, they will tell you when to take the medication. This may be before, during, or after your chemotherapy or radiation.

Medications work differently for different people. If the medication you’re taking doesn’t control your nausea and vomiting, tell your healthcare provider. You may need to try a different medication or take more than 1 type of medication. Your healthcare provider will work with you to find the medication that works best for you.

Medication instructions

If your healthcare provider gives you a prescription for medication to take at home, it’s important to follow their instructions for how to take it. They may tell you to take it on a regular schedule, even if you don’t feel nauseous. Or, they may tell you to take it as soon as you start feeling nauseous. **In either case, take it on time and don’t wait.**

Follow guidelines for eating and drinking

Guidelines for drinking

- Drink at least 8 to 10 (8-ounce) glasses of liquids per day.
- Drink slowly and in small amounts.
- Don’t drink anything for at least 1 hour before and 1 hour after you eat.
- Try drinking cool, clear, unsweetened fruit juices such as grape juice or light-colored sodas that have lost their fizz.
- Choose drinks that don’t have caffeine. Caffeine can make you

dehydrated.

Guidelines for eating

- Eat small, frequent meals. Eat your meals slowly.
- Chew your food well and sit upright for 2 hours after eating. This can help with digestion.
- Avoid eating foods that have a strong smell.
    - If you’re bothered by strong smells, try eating your foods at room temperature or cold.
- Avoid eating foods that are fried, greasy, creamy, rich, or spicy.
- Try eating dry foods (such as crackers, cereal, or toast) before getting out of bed in the morning. This can prevent nausea or dry heaves.
- Suck on hard candy, such as mints, ginger, or tart candies.
- Eat a light meal before and after your chemotherapy treatment.

Be sure to brush your teeth and keep your mouth clean. Rinse out your mouth after vomiting.

If you have questions about eating or drinking, ask your healthcare provider to schedule an appointment with a dietitian for you. A dietitian can help you eat well during your treatment and make sure you’re getting the nutrients your body needs.

Use relaxation methods to manage stress

Examples of relaxation methods include:

- Listening to music
- Doing deep breathing exercises
- Doing yoga
- Meditating
- Applying a damp washcloth with or without peppermint oil to the back of your neck for 30 minutes

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), a method similar to yoga that helps reduce tension in the body
- Exercising at home

Use acupressure and other complementary therapies

Acupressure is a healing practice that uses finger pressure on specific places on your body. Acupressure can help relieve muscle tension and increase blood circulation. It can also help relieve nausea and vomiting. To learn how to do acupressure on yourself, read our resource *Acupressure for Nausea and Vomiting* (www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_nausea_vomiting) or watch the video below.

Please visit **www.mskcc.org/pe/nausea_vomiting** to watch this video.

Complementary therapies (such as acupuncture, massage, and music therapy) can be done along with traditional medical treatments to help you relax and control your nausea and vomiting. For more information or to schedule an appointment, contact Memorial Sloan Kettering's (MSK) Integrative Medicine Service at 646-449-1010.

When to Call Your Healthcare Provider

Call your healthcare provider if you:

- Vomit 3 to 5 times within a 24-hour period
- Take your medication and still feel nauseous
- Have any questions or concerns

If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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