



Nausea & Vomiting

Nausea (feeling ill or sick to your stomach) or vomiting (throwing up or puking) may be caused by the cancer itself, or the cancer treatments such as chemo therapy, radiation therapy or surgery.

What is nausea?

Nausea and throwing up can also happen when first starting pain meds like opioids. You may feel like this for a short time while your body becomes used to the new drug.

To help handle your nausea and vomiting you can:

- Learn the causes of your nausea and throwing up
- Make changes to your lifestyle
- Talk to your healthcare team about your concerns

Having all the facts will put you in a better place to talk with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about the best ways to treat your nausea and throwing up.

What to expect in your care

If your chemo is likely to cause nausea, your cancer doctor will order anti-nausea drugs to prevent or reduce the nausea you may have after your chemo treatments. Your health care team will tell you when to take your meds.

Some people also feel sick when starting or taking more of their pain meds. This mostly lasts only a couple of days. It is of great value to tell your health care team if this affects you, so that you can have drugs prescribed to ease this type of nausea.

There are many drugs to control nausea and throwing up and your doctor will order one or more of them for you. Some things to remember are:

- Make sure you get all the anti-nausea drugs prescribed for you.
- Let your doctor or nurse know if your drugstore does not have them or if you cannot afford to pay for them.
- If you are not sure how to take your anti-nausea meds, call your doctor or nurse at the number supplied by your cancer centre.
- Take the anti-nausea drugs as your doctor has ordered. If you are throwing up and cannot take them, call your doctor or nurse.
- If the anti-nausea meds help to lessen your nausea and throwing up but not as much as you would like, call your doctor or nurse. The drug dose may have to be changed, or the doctor may order a different drug.

Paying for prescription drugs

BC Cancer Agency covers the cost of standard chemotherapy, chemotherapy given by mouth and hormone treatments. You may be required to buy medications to control symptoms (e.g. nausea and throwing up) linked to these treatments.

Prescription drugs can be bought at any drugstore in your town.

If you need money to help with the cost of prescription drugs related to your cancer treatment, there is help available.

For information about Financial Assistance please visit the Practical Support page at www.bccancer.bc.ca.

If you are not sure about eligibility for programs or you have an urgent financial need, call your Cancer Centre's Patient & Family Counselling Services to make an appointment with a counsellor.

What you can do for yourself

Nausea and throwing up can be very unpleasant and you may not want or be able to do the things that are important to you. Also, if you throw up a lot your body may lose too much fluid and get dehydrated.

You should call the nurse using the phone number supplied by your cancer centre if:

- You have nausea that lasts for more than a few days, or if nausea keeps you from doing things that are important to you
- You throw up more than twice per day
- You cannot keep any liquids (such as water, juices, soda) or food down
- You cannot keep your drugs down
- You are throwing up many times and your pee is dark yellow and you are not going to the bathroom as often as you usually do
- You are throwing up and feel dizzy or confused
- The stuff you throw up looks like coffee grounds (this could be blood)

Only you can determine how sick you feel and if you need some help to cope better. Please be sure to talk with your health care team about how you are feeling.

Tips for Taking your Medications

When taking your anti-nausea meds you may want to try one or more things that people tell us they have found helpful.

- Try eating foods and drinking liquids that are easy for you to take, or have made you feel better when you had the flu, had morning sickness or were ill from stress. These might be bland foods, sour candy, pickles, dry crackers, toast, ginger ale, flat soda, or others
- Try eating small, frequent meals instead of three large meals a day
- Try chewing food slowly and well
- Do not eat your favorite foods when you are nauseated
- Do not eat fatty or fried foods, very spicy foods, or very sweet foods when you are nauseated.
- If fitting, have somebody else make the meals when you are nauseated.
- If you have nausea and throwing up only for a few days after chemo, cook and freeze some meals so that you can reheat them during the times you are nauseated
- Eat foods that are lukewarm or cold because the smells of hot foods may make your nausea worse
- Sip fluids often through the day
- Keep your mouth clean. Brush your teeth at least twice a day.
- Ask your counsellor or nurse if they can help you learn relaxation exercises. These might help you feel less nervous and more in control, and lower your nausea.

Learn more

Practical Tips to Help Manage Nausea
(BC Cancer Agency Nutrition Program):

www.bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/services/nutrition

List of website links for more information about nausea
(BC Cancer Agency Library)

www.bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/services/library/recommended-websites/managing-symptoms-and-side-effects-websites/nausea-websites

For more diet suggestions for nausea please see our nutrition handouts section:

www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/nutrition/nutrition-handouts