



Belfast Health and
Social Care Trust



Helpful tips for people with
Nausea and Vomiting

Nausea and vomiting are common side effects of certain cancer treatments. They may also be due to the illness itself. Poor health, admission to hospital or regular visits for treatment may cause anxiety. This can also affect how nauseated you feel and how well you cope with it. People react differently to treatment, such as radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Some have very few problems. If nausea or vomiting does occur, talk to your doctor as there are medicines and other ways to reduce or prevent these side effects.

What is nausea?

Most people describe nausea as 'feeling sick'. Nausea may be followed by vomiting. Often it is more difficult to stop someone feeling sick than to stop them being sick.

Nausea or vomiting occurs whenever the brain's vomiting centre is stimulated.

Causes:

Radiotherapy - it depends on which part of your body is being treated, but tell the radiographers or your doctor if you suffer from nausea.

You can be given medication to control it. Nausea may continue for a couple of weeks after the end of treatment.

Chemotherapy - usually given over several months. In most cases each treatment is followed by a rest period. Nausea or vomiting may occur soon after treatment. Occasionally sickness may last longer. If this happens contact the hospital or your family doctor (GP).

Anticipatory nausea or vomiting may happen if something reminds you of a treatment you had in the past which caused sickness. Support can be offered to help you cope with anticipatory sickness.

Remember sickness may be nothing to do with your illness or treatment. You may have picked up a 'tummy bug' or eaten something which has upset your stomach.

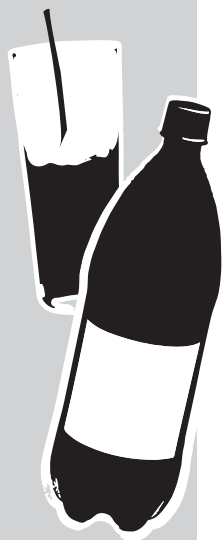
What medications may be prescribed?

Medications used to prevent or control nausea and vomiting are called anti-emetics. Anti-emetics can be given in various ways and there are different types available.

If the first one you are prescribed does not work, it can be changed.

Having to change your antiemetic is not a sign of how well your treatment is working

Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist may also be able to tell you about other support services, which are available.



What about eating and drinking?

Don't force yourself to eat when you feel sick. However, it is important to drink plenty to prevent dehydration.

The following tips may help:

- Clear, cold drinks may be better tolerated.
- Sip fizzy drinks such as soda water, ginger beer/ale or lemonade.
- Use a straw.
- Sorbet or jelly may be easier to manage.
- Herbal, ginger or peppermint tea may settle an upset stomach.
- You may find sucking ice cubes helps to make your mouth feel fresh. These can be flavoured with cordials and fruit juice.
- Sucking lemon flavoured sweets or mints may help reduce nausea.

Start with small meals and snacks often and build up to your normal diet as the sickness improves.

Try:

- Dry foods eg. toast, crackers or biscuits.
- Salty foods eg. crisps, peanuts and cheese cubes (unless your mouth is sore).
- Scone or teacake.
- Sandwiches with a plain filling eg. lean meat.
- Ginger foods eg. ginger biscuits, cake.

- Ice cream, fruit sorbets, jelly, custard, rice, mousse, yoghurt.
- Light meal eg. plain chicken / turkey, meat or fish with plain potato, rice or pasta.



Practical Tips:

- Eat slowly and relax afterwards, but avoid lying flat for 30 minutes after eating.
- Try not to drink with a meal, but have one 30 minutes before or after eating.
- Nausea may become worse when your stomach is empty so try to take snacks often.
- If possible, a short walk in the fresh air before eating may help.



Fresh air also helps to give you an appetite.

- Avoid wearing tight fitting clothes.
- Some people may find that very spicy, rich or fatty foods may make them worse – avoid them if they do.
- If the smell of cooking makes you feel sick you could try eating cold foods such as sandwiches, cold meats, cold desserts eg. yoghurts and mousses.
- Let a friend or relative cook if they offer.
- Try to relax and eat in a ventilated room



Tips to keep your mouth clean and healthy:

- Drink as much as you can, to keep your mouth fresh.
- Use a mouthwash often, especially after vomiting.
- Clean your teeth often using a soft toothbrush.
- Clean your dentures after meals as well as at night.
- Keep lips moist with lip balm.

The advice in this leaflet may not be suitable if you follow a 'special diet' for conditions such as diabetes, coeliac disease or have a food allergy – please speak to your Dietitian or GP if concerned.

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