

Patient Education Sheet

Managing Chemotherapy Induced Nausea and Vomiting

What is Chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting?

Nausea and vomiting are possible side effects of certain chemotherapy and biotherapy drugs that are used to treat cancer. Nausea is a sick, uncomfortable feeling in your stomach that often comes before you vomit, or "throw up."

Chemotherapy and biotherapy drugs can irritate your stomach or stimulate the vomiting center in your brain. Not all chemotherapy and biotherapy drugs cause nausea and vomiting. Fortunately, there are many medications available to treat and prevent these unpleasant symptoms. It is very important to follow the instructions given to you by your nurse or doctor regarding how and when to take the medications. A goal is to try to prevent nausea or vomiting from starting at all.

Are there things I can do to reduce nausea and vomiting?

- Eat lightly on the day you get chemotherapy and/or biotherapy.
- Eat small amounts of food often during the day, instead of three large meals. Be sure to include high protein and high calorie snacks.
- Eat slowly, in a pleasant place. Give yourself plenty of time to eat.
- Eat when ever you feel like eating and eat before you are too hungry.
- Eat bland dry foods, such as toast, crackers, or cereal without milk. This may be especially helpful first thing in the morning.
- Avoid spicy "hot" foods, such as chili, hot peppers or barbeque sauces. Avoid fatty, fried or greasy foods.
- Drink plenty of fluids such as water and juice throughout the day. Most people getting chemotherapy should drink at least two quarts of fluid each day.
- Don't lay flat for at least two hours after eating.
- Do not exercise right after you eat.
- Mint and ginger are natural anti-nausea treatments. These ingredients can be found in teas and candy.
- If foods with strong odors bother you, go into another room while these foods are cooking.
- Avoid your favorite foods during times of severe stomach upset. That way you will not connect them in your mind with nausea and vomiting.
- Hard candy such as lemon drops or peppermint may relieve a metallic taste in your mouth. If you have a metallic taste in your mouth, use plastic utensils whenever possible.

What are anti-emetic medicines?

Anti-emetic means against vomiting. Anti-emetic medicine is medicine that helps to prevent nausea and vomiting. Your doctor has prescribed anti-emetic medicine for you to take to prevent nausea and vomiting. It is important that you take your anti-emetic medicine as prescribed by your doctor. If pills do not stay down, or your anti-emetic medicine does not seem to be working, tell your doctor or nurse. There are many different kinds of anti-emetic medicines and/or other drugs that may work better.

Are there other ways to help relieve nausea and vomiting?

- ✓ Rest before and after meals, but do not lie down for 2 hours after eating. Sit in a comfortable chair with your feet up.
- ✓ Slow deep breathing through your mouth or swallowing will sometimes help the feeling of nausea pass.
- ✓ Avoid unpleasant sights, sounds, and smells that might trigger nausea.
- ✓ Do mouth care after every meal and before meals if you have a bad taste in your mouth.
- ✓ A bad taste in your mouth may be taken away by rinsing your mouth, removing and cleaning dentures, brushing your teeth, or sucking on hard candy such as peppermint.
- ✓ Complementary medicine is a growing field and often has helpful added benefits. You may benefit from some of these modalities such as ginger capsules, acupressure wrist bands, acupuncture, relaxation, meditation and imagery. Ask your doctor about complimentary medicine and the potential benefit for you.

- ✓ A nutrition consult may be helpful to guide you in making food choices to maintain a healthy balanced diet and help you to maintain weight. Please talk to your doctor or nurse, if you have concerns about your nutrition or weight.

When should I call my doctor or nurse?

Call your healthcare provider for the following:

- Nausea or vomiting lasting longer than 24 hours or if you are unable to eat or drink.
- Weight loss of more than 5 pound in a week.
- Stomach pain.
- Feeling weak or dizzy.

Additional Resources

These web sites have additional information on Chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting

- National Cancer Institute (800-4-CANCER) www.cancer.gov
- American Cancer Society (800-ACS-2345) www.cancer.org
- Livestrong Foundation cancer support(866-673-7205) www.livestrong.org

Sources:

The American Cancer Society @ www.cancer.org
ASCO Guidelines, Cancer.net

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