

## **NAUSEA AND VOMITING**

### **The Cause**

Nausea and vomiting can be caused by therapies to treat cancer, such as chemotherapy, radiation, and oral medications, as well as direct effect of cancer itself. Often times there is more than one cause. Chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting (CINV) may be immediate, delayed, or even anticipatory - which means just thinking about treatment or having a trigger such as a smell or entering the hospital causes a patient to become nauseated. Radiation therapy can cause nausea and vomiting when the abdominal region is in the radiation field, when they receive brain radiation, or when larger doses are administered. Blockages (obstructions) in the digestive tract caused by cancer also can contribute to nausea and vomiting. Other causes include supplements or opioid pain medications, which can be really hard on the stomach if not taken with food; acid reflux, and constipation.

### **The Problem**

Anything that impacts eating is a problem during treatment, as weight loss is a side effect that can cause delay or end in treatment, not to mention affecting overall quality of life. Dehydration and electrolyte imbalances may also occur. No one likes to be nauseated. No one.

### **Here's What Helps**

#### **1 Antinausea (antiemetic) Medications**

There are a multitude of prescription medications to address CINV and what works for one patient may not work for another. Often a combination of medications will be prescribed "as needed," and these medications address different causes of nausea. Ideally these medications are to be used as little as possible, since some can cause additional side effects, like constipation, which then may lead to nausea and isn't that why the medication was prescribed? But the first place to start is preventing the nausea and vomiting, and that would be with prescription medications. To confuse things further, prescription medications are often given prior to infusions, so patients don't always experience nausea right away and forgo the pills they were given by their oncologist. Then they're playing catch up.

#### **2 Prevention**

As mentioned, first line of treatment is making sure all medications are taken as prescribed. Contact your doctor or nurse to make sure you are taking them correctly. If nausea and vomiting persist even when taking medications as directed, contact your care team as medications can be changed.

Water, water, water. Or whatever you can take in to hydrate. Water might not always taste good due to treatment, so flavor it with a splash of juice or squeeze of citrus. Broths, jello, popsicles, and herbal teas count towards hydration.

### **3 Ginger**

Speaking of tea, ginger root tea has been found in some patients to help reduce nausea. You know how ginger ale helps with stomach upset when you have the flu? It can help with treatment-induced nausea, too. Some studies have shown starting ginger prior to starting chemotherapy is effective, while other studies don't show any improvement in nausea when taking ginger.

### **4 Acupuncture / Acupressure**

Acupuncture has been shown to be effective in treatment chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting. If you aren't able to get acupuncture, look online for acupressure wrist bands, which apply light pressure to acupuncture points in each wrist.

### **5 Diet**

Avoid strong odors and try eating cold, bland foods like applesauce or crackers. Avoid fatty or fried foods, and don't try and eat your favorite foods because you might become averse to eating them down the road.

### **6 Relaxation Exercises**

Anticipatory nausea is a real thing. Incorporating relaxation exercises into your routine can help to ease anxiety. Meditation, yoga, acupuncture, listening to calming music, aromatherapy, and guided imagery are just some ways patients relax.

### **7 Aromatherapy**

Whereas some odors may trigger nausea, others have been found to alleviate it. Peppermint, lavender, and ginger are scents that patients have reported help decrease nausea. These essential oils also help when nausea is triggered by other odors. Some patients prefer citrus scents, and waft lemon oil or orange peel under their nose. One study even found sniffing rubbing alcohol reduced nausea in patients in an emergency room setting.

### **8 Mint or No Mint?**

Peppermints or mint tea are traditionally used to settle an upset stomach. They might be helpful during treatment, but mint might also trigger nausea by exacerbating acid reflux. Acid reflux is one of those common, non-chemotherapy causes of nausea and is tricky to diagnose in patients who never experienced it before. So approach mint with caution, it may help, or it may not.

Not everyone will experience nausea and vomiting, but it may occur at any time during treatment. Prepare a small bag to carry that contains anti-nausea medication (label which to take at first sign of nausea and which to take for breakthrough nausea), a few emesis bags (ask your nurse), some ginger chews, a couple of ginger tea bags, essential oil or alcohol pads, a snack bag of crackers, and acupressure bands. Better to be overprepared than caught off guard.

## **RECIPES**

### **Ginger Tea**

Tea made from fresh ginger tastes a whole lot better than that made with tea bags, but tea bags are convenient to throw in a purse or backpack. Boil 2 cups of water in a small pot. Peel and slice 2 inches of ginger root, add to boiling water, reduce heat to a simmer, and cover for at least 10 minutes. Add lime or honey for flavor.

### **Watermelon Ginger Lime Popsicles**

Blend 4 cups cubed, seedless watermelon,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup honey, 2 TBSP lime juice and 2 tsp peeled, grated ginger until smooth. Pour into popsicle molds and freeze. Small cups or ice cube trays can also be used as molds.

### **Congee**

Congee, or jook, is rice porridge that is simple to make and easy to digest. Thoroughly rinse 1 cup of jasmine rice, then add 6 - 8 cups of water or broth in a slow cooker and cook for 5 hours on high or 8 hours on low. To make in an Instant Pot, cook for 15 minutes on high and let it release naturally (not quick). Congee can also be made on a stove top but it requires a bit more attention and stirring. Add ginger or fennel - herbs that support digestion - for flavor. You can also add spices like cinnamon or cardemon for a sweeter dish. There are so many recipes online with ideas for adding ingredients.