

Moving oncology care forward so that you can look forward to life's moments

Nausea and vomiting in persons receiving cancer treatment



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If you experience nausea and vomiting during your cancer treatment it can prevent you from consuming adequate amounts of food and fluids, resulting in malnutrition (undernutrition). Malnutrition in persons receiving cancer treatment is associated with negative health outcomes such as increased hospital admissions, longer hospital stays, increased healthcare costs, increased risk for infections, reduced tolerance and compliance to treatment and reduced effectiveness of treatment.

Vomiting and an inadequate intake of fluids can result in dehydration. Dehydration is when your body loses too much water and electrolytes which you are unable to replace. Dehydration can be life-threatening, and therefore it's important to treat vomiting and seek medical assistance when it does not stop.

1 Nausea and vomiting symptoms



Nausea

Nausea is feeling the urge to vomit – often called being sick to your stomach.














Vomiting

Vomiting is forcing the contents of the stomach up through the food pipe (oesophagus) and out of the mouth – often described as throwing up.






2 Managing nausea and vomiting symptoms

What to do






	Eat small meals regularly (5-6 per day)
	Eat slowly and chew your food thoroughly
	Eat foods from all the food groups when you can tolerate them, to ensure optimal nutrition
	Eat dry, bland, plain salty foods e.g. pretzels or crackers throughout the day
	If you wake up nauseous in the morning, eat dry foods e.g. bread, crackers or pretzels

	Eat food and sip on clear liquids at room temperature or cooler
	Drink plenty of clear fluids (6-8 glasses/day) such as safe drinking water, clear juices (without fruit pieces in it), ginger ale, weak rooibos tea with honey, flat sodas, broth, non-caffeinated energy drinks or oral rehydration solutions (available over-the-counter at the pharmacy). Jelly and popsicles are included as clear liquids
	Sip slowly on clear liquids between meals, and not with meals
	Allow carbonated beverages to go flat before drinking
	Rinse your mouth throughout the day, especially before and after eating, with a solution of 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda added to 240ml water
	Ask friends or family to prepare your food for you if food smells worsen your nausea
	Sit up when eating and keep your head raised an hour after eating
	Eat in a comfortable and well-ventilated area
	Suck on peppermint or lemon drop candies, if you have bad taste in your mouth
	Suck on ginger candies, nibble on crystallised ginger, eat ginger biscuits or drink ginger tea to alleviate nausea
	Take your anti-nausea and anti-vomiting medication as prescribed. Contact your healthcare provider if nausea and vomiting persist

What to avoid

	Avoid skipping meals, as an empty stomach may increase nausea
	Avoid food and drinks that are very sweet, greasy, spicy and high-fat
	Avoid food and drinks with strong smells
	Avoid tomatoes and other acidic foods and beverages (e.g. citrus fruits)
	Avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages

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	Avoid having your favourite foods and drinks as you may dislike them later
	Avoid eating in a room that has cooking odours and / or that is warm
	Avoid any activity directly after eating
	Avoid brushing your teeth after eating
	In case of vomiting, avoid eating food, and rather sip on clear fluids e.g. juice, broth or water until the vomiting is controlled

General recommendations to manage nausea and vomiting



Place a cold cloth on your forehead



Wear loose-fitting clothes



Take deep, slow breaths through your mouth when nauseous



Distract yourself by watching tv, listening to the radio etc.













Don't make any sudden movements



Note down when you are vomiting and nauseous, and the possible reasons why

3 Possible signs and symptoms of dehydration

	Feeling thirsty
	Racing heartbeat
	Cold, clammy skin
	Headache
	Dry mouth, lips and tongue
	Feeling tired
	Feeling dizzy / light-headed
	Dark-yellow, strong-smelling urine
	Not urinating as often as usual
	Sunken eyes

Life Oncology units have multidisciplinary teams that can support you during your journey to recovery – this includes registered dietitians (RDs).

The following are some of the areas a registered dietitian can help you in:



Assess your nutritional status and your current dietary intake



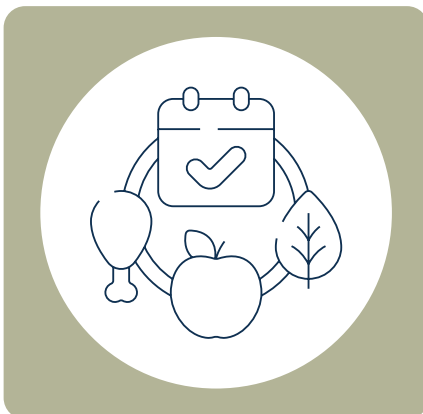
Provide you with an individualised meal plan for optimal nutrition



Recommend appropriate oral supplements to provide you with additional nutrients, including protein and energy when you are not meeting your nutritional needs through food alone



Provide you with guidelines on how to manage cancer treatment side effects that influence your dietary intake



If you need assistance with any of the above areas – ask your healthcare provider to refer you to a registered dietitian.

References

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CANSA

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