

# Information Sheet:

## Cancer Treatment & Nausea/Vomiting

Nausea is an unpleasant wave-like feeling in the back of the throat and/or stomach that may or may not result in vomiting. Vomiting is the forceful ejection of the contents of the stomach through the mouth. Retching is the movement of the stomach and throat without vomiting.

People with cancer may have nausea due to their cancer or due to some treatments, including chemotherapy. Not all patients have nausea. Some people have 'anticipatory' nausea or vomiting, prompted by the memory of a treatment that caused sickness. For others, anxiety about cancer or treatment can cause nausea and/or vomiting.

Fortunately, nausea can usually be managed by medication and other changes. Your doctor will give you medication to help prevent and/or control nausea. **Always** follow your doctor's advice for taking these medications, as they may cause side effects if taken wrongly.

### How can I manage my nausea/vomiting?

- ❖ An empty stomach can trigger nausea, so try eating small, frequent meals (5 to 6), instead of 3 large meals per day. Have snacks between meals.
- ❖ Try to eat the largest meal at a time of day when you are least nauseated (this is often the morning for many people).
- ❖ Eat and drink slowly. Chewing food thoroughly helps it to be digested more easily.
- ❖ Avoid very sweet, spicy, fatty or fried foods.
- ❖ Avoid unpleasant cooking smells by eating meals cold or at room temperature.
- ❖ Try foods low in fat, such as lean meats, low fat milk and yoghurt.
- ❖ Some people find peppermint (sweets or tea) and ginger (ale, tea and biscuits) to be of benefit.
- ❖ Drink any fluids you can tolerate. Cool, clear liquids are best. Try jelly, ice cubes made of any kind of liquid, icy-poles, and clear soups.
- ❖ Avoid eating your favourite foods when you are feeling sick, as they may become a trigger for nausea. Instead, after the nausea passes, use your favourite foods to perk up your appetite.
- ❖ Rest in a chair after eating. Avoid lying down as this may trigger reflux, nausea and vomiting.

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- ❖ Your friends and family members may like to cook so you can avoid smells in the kitchen.
- ❖ If nausea does bother you:
  - *take deep breaths and relax*
  - *chew ice chips until nausea has passed*
  - *sip small quantities of clear, "flat" carbonated drinks*
- ❖ If anticipatory nausea associated with chemotherapy bothers you, try some relaxation techniques.
- ❖ When you're nauseated, try to distract yourself with activities like listening to music, reading or talking about other things.
- ❖ Sometimes fresh air can help. When possible, sit by an open window or sit outdoors.

## What should I do if I vomit?

- ❖ Sip clear fluids at first. Then start to eat soft foods such as soups and smoothies, pasta and mashed vegetables.
- ❖ Potassium rich foods such as bananas are ideal to replace nutrients lost through vomiting.
- ❖ It is important to note that some nausea medications can cause constipation. It is very important to drink plenty of fluids, eat a high fibre diet and ensure regular gentle exercise to try to prevent this from occurring.

## Tell your Doctor or Nurse if you have:

- Uncontrolled vomiting and feel dizzy or lightheaded when standing (you may be dehydrated)
- Nausea that is not controlled with the anti-nausea drugs
- Been unable to eat because of continued problems with nausea
- Been unable to take your medications

**We encourage you to speak to your healthcare team if you have any concerns about your nausea/vomiting.**

We welcome feedback at:

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**Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is located on the traditional land of the Gunai Kurnai people.**

*My team is* **BRHS**