

Nausea and vomiting

Palliative and end-of-life care

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



People living with an illness or taking certain medications may experience digestive issues. However, nausea and vomiting can often be prevented or reduced by following the advice in this guide.

When **eating**, try the following:

- Eat smaller meals more often, making sure to chew your food well and eat slowly.
- Choose cold or room-temperature foods.
- Choose mild-smelling foods such as diluted juices, ginger ale, lemonade, gelatin-based desserts (Jell-O), custards, sorbets, dry cereals, crackers, toast, potatoes, and sandwiches.
- Choose salty foods, which are often easier to digest than sweet foods.
- Choose sweet foods that are easier to digest, such as gelatin-based desserts (Jell-O), sorbets, and dry cookies.
- Consider adding lemon or ginger to your food or drinks.
- For morning nausea, try eating dry foods like crackers, toast, or dry cereal before getting out of bed.

When **drinking**, try the following:

- Drink small amounts of liquids frequently (small sips) to prevent dehydration.
- Drink liquids an hour before or after meals.
- Choose cold or chilled beverages.
- Freeze liquids into popsicles.



Things to avoid or adjust based on your tolerance:

- Eating both hot and cold foods in the same meal.
- Eating fried, fatty, or spicy foods, and eating highly acidic foods such as lemons, oranges, and vinegar.
- Eating when you feel nauseated.
- Lying down within two hours of eating; sitting upright or in a semi-upright position aids digestion.
- Exposure to unpleasant odours.
- Food smells when cooking; ensure proper ventilation if you have to be near the kitchen.

After vomiting, make sure to:

- Rinse your mouth with water or brush your teeth.
- Gargle with one cup of warm water and one teaspoon of baking soda or salt. Spit it out, then rinse your mouth with water. Avoid alcohol-based mouthwashes, which can cause dry mouth.
- Take small sips of clear fluids, such as water or apple juice, once your stomach has settled.
- Drink enough fluids to replace the salt and potassium lost by vomiting; drink a homemade rehydration solution or a commercial oral rehydration solution like Gastrolyte[®], Pedialyte[®] or Pediatric Electrolyte[®].

Homemade rehydration solution

- 1.25 mL (1/4 tsp.) salt
- 250 mL (1 cup) fruit juice
- 500 mL (2 cups) water

Medications

- If you have or expect to have nausea, take your anti-nausea medication, e.g., Gravol® (dimenhydrinate), Stemetil® (prochlorperazine) or Haldol® (haloperidol), as prescribed. If you have any questions, contact your pharmacist, nurse, or doctor.
- Take only the dose prescribed.
- Try to treat the underlying cause of the nausea when possible, such as a food intolerance, digestive issues, pain, or constipation.
- Never take medication prescribed for someone else.
- If you vomit after taking your medication, **ask your PHARMACIST** whether you should retake the dose (it's often recommended to retake pain medication rather than risk the pain becoming unbearable).

Notes

- Rinse your mouth in the morning, as the saliva that builds up overnight can cause nausea.
- Avoid brushing your teeth immediately after eating and avoid touching your tongue with the toothbrush.
- Get out of bed slowly and avoid sudden movements or changes in position.
- Try relaxation techniques.
- **Distract yourself** by watching TV, listening to music, or talking to loved ones, to help take your mind off the nausea. Give it a try!



When vomiting

- Keep a bucket or a disposable bag within reach.
- If you must vomit while in bed, lie on your side instead of on your back to reduce the risk of choking.
- A cold, damp washcloth can help you feel better when vomiting.



Important

Let the nurse know if:

- Vomiting lasts for more than a few hours.
- You experience abdominal pain or notice blood in your vomit (blood may be bright red or dark brown, like coffee grounds).
- You develop signs of dehydration, such as decreased urine output, dizziness or vertigo, dry mouth, or increased thirst.
- You experience projectile vomiting.
- The vomit smells like fecal matter.
- The anti-nausea medications are not working.
- You are increasingly drowsy and difficult to wake up.



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