



# Nausea and Vomiting

**Having nausea (being sick to your stomach like you want to throw up) and vomiting (throwing up) can cause a great deal of discomfort and distress.** These symptoms may happen during a serious illness or as a passing problem that you can treat yourself.

**Nausea and vomiting often happen together, but they are two different symptoms.** Sometimes the feeling of nausea happens alone. At other times you may experience feeling sick and actual vomiting (forceful throwing up of stomach contents) at the same time. Nausea and vomiting may be temporary or may last longer, depending on what's causing it.

## Other Symptoms of Nausea and Vomiting

- Becoming pale (losing color in face)
- Breaking into a cold sweat
- Increased mouth fluids (salivation)
- Constant, or waves, of feeling queasy or “butterflies” in the stomach
- Gagging or “dry heaves”

## What Can Cause Nausea and Vomiting?

Nausea and vomiting may occur for many reasons.

- Stomach virus (“stomach flu”) or infection
- Side effect of many medications
- Side effect of cancer treatments like chemotherapy and radiation
- Stomach disorder or disease, like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Motion sickness
- Constipation
- Head injury like concussion
- Emotions such as fear or anxiety

## Problems Caused by Nausea and Vomiting

- Losing your appetite
- Losing weight
- Becoming dehydrated (not enough water)
- Vitamin and mineral imbalance
- Becoming inactive

## What May Help?

- Sit quietly when feeling sick. Sometimes movement can make nausea worse.
- Try to avoid smells that make you feel more sick.
- Get fresh air by going outside or opening a window.
- Do things that may distract you, like watching television.
- Drink water or soda; if you have vomited repeatedly, a “sports drink” may be able to replace the essential minerals better than water alone.
- Eat a number of small meals throughout the day, instead of less frequent big meals.
- Eat food with water in them: soups, herbal tea (non-caffeine), popsicles, sherbet, and gelatin.
- Avoid foods that may irritate your stomach, like spicy foods or those with acid.
- Sit up after you eat. Lying down makes it harder to digest your food.
- Consider trying an over-the-counter medication that is used for nausea, such as Pepto-Bismol or Emetrol.

**If you have nausea and vomiting frequently, keep a diary of your symptoms to help your doctor understand the reason for your problem. In the diary, answer these questions:**

- What time of day does nausea occur?
- Are there things that make the nausea worse?
- Are there things that make the nausea better?
- Is nausea worse before or after eating?
- If there is vomiting, when does it occur?
- Are there things that bring on vomiting?
- Do you also have fever? pain? dizziness? blurry vision? headache?
- Do you have other symptoms such as diarrhea, constipation, gas, black stools, frequent urination, increased thirst, or blood in your urine?

## When to Call Your Doctor:

If you have tried everything to help yourself, but you still don't feel better, you need to make an appointment with your doctor. There are effective medications for nausea and vomiting that your doctor can prescribe, depending on your specific symptoms. Then he or she can decide if tests are needed to understand exactly what's going on.

Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following:

- Vomiting with a high fever
- Vomiting for greater than 24 hours
- Blood in the vomit
- Severe abdominal pain
- Headache and stiff neck
- Signs of dehydration (not enough water) such as dry mouth, peeing less often, or dark urine

### Patient Education Series

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## *When your symptoms are managed, you will:*

- Enjoy activities and have more energy
- Enjoy family and friends
- Feel less stress and anxiety
- Get better sleep at night
- Have a better quality of life

This educational material is provided by the Palliative Care Project, a partnership between Community Care of Brooklyn and the MJHS Institute for Innovation in Palliative Care.