

## Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

# 13. Nausea & Vomiting

Nausea and vomiting can often occur either due to the cancer or following treatments such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy. However, it can also be caused by other factors such as: constipation, anaesthetics, pain, infection or stomach irritation, and some drugs given for pain relief and/or those taken by mouth which act on certain cells in the stomach.

## What can be done to manage the nausea and vomiting?

- It is important to discuss your symptoms with your oncology doctor or radiographer so that they can identify the reason for your nausea and choose the correct treatment for you. It is unlikely your radiotherapy will need to be suspended. Some people feel sick at the beginning of a course of treatment and find that nausea often disappears within a day or two. Your doctor may be able to prescribe anti-sickness medication and/or alter your treatment. Nausea may continue for a couple of weeks after the end of treatment.
- It is important to drink plenty, taking small sips, but don't drink too much just before you eat. Even if you cannot manage food it is important to keep drinking. Some people find chilled, fizzy and iced drinks (sipped slowly or through a straw) can be easier; e.g. tonic water, mineral water, lemonade.
- Try to avoid eating, drinking or preparing food when you feel sick. If possible let someone else prepare and cook your food. You may find that your treatment makes things taste different than before, which could increase the feeling of nausea.
- Try to eat small snacks and meals regularly through the day, rather than large meals. It may help to avoid very fatty foods or those that have a strong smell. Cold or room temperature foods (e.g. dry toast or crackers, tinned fruit and ice cream, biscuits, cereal) may be preferable.
- Sit upright whenever possible and eat slowly.
- Remedies such as ginger and peppermint are often helpful in controlling nausea.
- Cold foods and snacks may be preferable to hot meals because they generally have a less strong smell. Avoid fatty foods if they upset you.
- Nausea and vomiting can be worse if you are feeling anxious or worried and relaxation techniques can help with this.
- Pain can induce the feeling of nausea so ensure that any pain you have is well controlled.
- Sometimes the large number of medicines people take causes them to feel sick. If this is the case speak to your doctor or pharmacist about the best way to take your medication.
- Some complementary therapies may help with nausea such as hypnotherapy and acupuncture (some find the use of acupressure bracelets or "Seabands" helpful).

# 13. Nausea & Vomiting

## - Resources / Information

### Thoughts and feelings:

- Memory of previous treatment, known as 'anticipatory nausea'. If you have had treatment before which made you feel sick or be sick, just the thought of having a similar treatment may make you feel sick, even before you have it. This is called anticipatory nausea and vomiting. It is quite common in people having several courses of chemotherapy. If there is no obvious reason for your nausea or vomiting, your doctor may ask for some tests to find out the cause.
- Anxiety — Remember sickness may be nothing to do with your illness or treatment. You may have picked up a 'tummy bug' or eaten something which has upset your stomach.
- Sights, smells and tastes
- Unpleasant thoughts—talk to your doctor about this

### Local Resources:

#### Other Resources:

Your Clinical Nurse Specialist or chemotherapy nurse can discuss the options available and methods of controlling symptoms.

### National Resources:

#### Macmillan Cancer Support Line

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

Call 0808 808 00 00 7 days a week 8:00am—8:00pm

Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on **+44 207 091 2230**

#### [Macmillan on-line Community](#)

Online support— to share experiences or vent your emotions find others who understand—join today!

**Marie Curie Support Line** — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support

[www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support](http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support)

Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open  
Monday to Friday - 08:00am – 6:00pm  
Saturday -11:00am – 5:00pm

### Other Resources :

#### Macmillan Booklets:

Cancer and Complimentary Therapies **MAC11645**

Managing the symptoms of Cancer **MAC11671**

Healthy Eating and Cancer **MAC12143**