



Brain, Spine, and Skull Base CANCER PROGRAM

Huntsman Cancer Institute at the University of Utah

April 2008 Newsletter

Brain tumor patients may need help to cope with nausea

Brain tumor patients can have even more trouble with nausea and vomiting than patients being treated for other types of cancer. Chemotherapy is the main cause of nausea and vomiting, but surgery and radiation treatments can also cause problems for brain tumor patients. That's because surgery or radiation can irritate or inflame the area of the brain that is associated with nausea and vomiting. Also, after surgery, medication, anesthesia, and constipation can cause people to vomit or feel nauseated.

Not everyone who has chemotherapy will have problems with nausea and vomiting; each individual reacts differently. But for those who do feel sick, controlling chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting—CINV—is important. Uncontrolled CINV can lead to serious problems. It can cause dehydration and malnutrition. It can get in the way of daily activities. And it can take a toll on emotional and social well-being. One of the biggest concerns about CINV is that it may keep a patient from getting the total dose of chemotherapy he or she needs to knock out the cancer cells.

Antiemetics—medications that prevent nausea and vomiting—can help control CINV. Antiemetics differ in the way they are taken: they may

be given as a pill, suppository, or injection. They also differ in the way that they work within the body to control CINV and in the possible side effects they may cause. Your doctor can discuss which antiemetic drug is best for you.

Patients may need help with nausea caused by radiation and surgery, as well as that caused by chemotherapy, if their treatment was in the part of the brain associated with nausea and vomiting. Corticosteroids can help in those cases. These are drugs that help reduce swelling. Reducing swelling can relieve nausea and vomiting by letting the brain function normally.

Cancer treatment-related nausea and vomiting are stressful, but medications and other strategies can help.



In This Issue



Brain tumor patients at risk for nausea



Tips to calm that queasy feeling



Medication can help—if taken correctly

The Brain, Spine, and Skull Base Cancer Program at Huntsman Cancer Institute provides each patient state-of-the-art medical, surgical, and radiation care. Patients are guided through the process of diagnosis, treatment, and social services to ensure individual needs are met.

Contact Us

Phone: (801) 585-0260

Fax: (801) 585-0159

huntsmancancer.org/neuro

Control nausea and vomiting to take in the nutrition your body needs to heal

Nutrition is an important part of your cancer treatment and recovery. Good nutrition allows your body to better tolerate cancer therapy with fewer side effects; it can also help you feel better and increase your energy. But how do you get the nutrition you need when you're feeling sick? Here are some suggestions to help decrease the nausea and vomiting that sometimes go along with cancer treatment:

- Avoid or limit fried or spicy foods and foods with strong odors.
- Eat dry, bland foods such as crackers or toast. Choose light food that is low in fat.
- Eat foods cold or at room temperature. Hot foods may add to nausea.
- Eat small, frequent meals slowly—five or six small meals throughout the day instead of one or two large meals.
- Avoid favorite foods during this time. You don't want to associate them with feeling bad. Eat them again when you're feeling well.
- Relax after meals to allow foods to digest.
- Breathe deeply and slowly to help ease nausea.
- Take good care of your mouth: brush your teeth three times daily and rinse with a saltwater solution. If you have a bad taste in your mouth, try brushing your teeth before eating.
- Use distraction techniques, such as walking, listening to music, or other enjoyable activities.



- Turn lights low and try fanning cool air on your face.
- Increase the amount of fluids you drink.
- Loosen clothes, get fresh air, and don't lie down after eating.
- Take medicine to control pain as prescribed.
- Ask your doctor about medication to help control nausea and vomiting.

For more information or to schedule an appointment with a registered dietitian, call the Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness Center at (801) 587-4585.



How to make your anti-nausea medication work as well as possible

About Anti-nausea Medications

- Fill your prescription for anti-nausea medication as soon as you get it.
- Take your medication as prescribed, or at the first signs of nausea.
- Take anti-nausea medications around the clock until the nausea cycle is broken.

Other Helpful Suggestions

- Keep a diary telling when your nausea occurs, what seemed to bring it on, and what helps ease it.
- Give your doctor a list of all drugs you're taking. Some, including pain medications, may cause nausea.

- Have someone with you when you take your medication until you know how it will affect you. Many anti-nausea drugs make people sleepy.

When to Call the Doctor

- If you are unable to keep down a significant amount of fluid for 24 hours
- If you have vomited more than six times in 24 hours
- If you still have nausea and vomiting after taking anti-nausea medication around the clock for 24 hours
- If your symptoms of nausea or vomiting do not follow their usual pattern