

Nausea and vomiting

Disclaimer: This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

Nausea and vomiting can be a problem for children having cancer treatment. This information sheet is provided to help you deal with nausea and vomiting.

What causes Nausea and Vomiting?

Some chemotherapy medicines cause **nausea** (feeling sick) and may make your child vomit. Some children who are having radiotherapy treatments also feel nauseous.

What stops nausea?

With the regular use of medications to treat nausea (eg. Ondansetron or Maxalon) most children do not have many problems.

What can the family do to help when our child has nausea?

There are a number of things that parents can do to help when their child is feeling nauseated or is vomiting.

- Anti-nausea medicines given before you leave home can be helpful.
- Some children are afraid of vomiting. They should be told that, while it is unpleasant, it is not serious and will stop with the end of the treatment. It is not a sign of their illness getting worse.
- It is always a good idea to have a bowl and tissues handy especially when travelling to and from the hospital.
- If your child cannot keep fluids down and becomes dehydrated, he or she may need intravenous fluids for a while.
- Foods rich in fat, such as butter, fried foods, chocolates, milk, may increase the nausea and so are best avoided. Be guided by what your child wishes to eat.
- Some foods that children may like are cold food without much smell, such as fruit juice, jelly or fruit pieces. Toast with a little butter or plain small biscuits are often quite tempting. Keep small snacks available for when the child feels able to eat.
- If treatments cause the child to feel nauseous or vomit, it is important that the child does not eat any favourite foods before coming to the hospital for treatment, because this can cause a long-term dislike of the foods involved.

When should my child take anti-nausea medicines?

- Anti-nausea medicines are also known as **anti-emetics**. Having these medicines regularly during chemotherapy and for a day or two after the therapy can help reduce nausea.
- When your child is in clinic or hospital, these medicines will usually be given by the nurses.
- At home, the best time to give these medicines is about half an hour before eating, or if nausea is severe, as soon as the child wakes before they get out of bed.
- The most common anti-nausea medicine we use is ondansetron (Zofran). There are different ways to give this; tablets, syrup, wafers that dissolve on the tongue, and intravenous (IV). The wafers can have a metallic taste and so should be placed on the tip of the tongue to dissolve, not further into the mouth where metallic tastes are stronger.

What if my child still feels sick?

If you feel that nausea is not well controlled in your child, please speak to your doctor, they may suggest other medicines or psychological intervention if appropriate.

If nausea or vomiting are problems for your child at home we would like you to let us know so we can help you manage them.

Any questions about this information may be directed to the Oncology Treatment Centre on 9845 2115 (8am-4pm) or Camperdown ward on 9845 1123. Further sheets are available from the Oncology staff or The Children's Hospital at Westmead's website at www.chw.edu.au. Updated **April 2003**.

the children's hospital at Westmead