

Managing Nausea and Vomiting

What to do

This handout is for patients of the Alvord Brain Tumor Center who are having nausea and vomiting. It lists 3 medicines that may help you manage your symptoms and explains why it is important to stay hydrated.

What causes nausea and vomiting?

Cancer, chemotherapy (chemo) and other medicines, radiation therapy, or electrolyte imbalance can cause nausea and vomiting. If you have very hard bowel movements (*constipation*), it might mean your intestines are blocked.

Nausea may be mild, where you just feel a little queasy. It can also be very bad, where you cannot keep anything down. If nausea is not treated, you may not be able to eat, drink, or do your daily activities. This can lead to weight loss, dehydration, depression, and fears about having more cancer treatments.

What can I do?

It is easiest to control nausea if you catch it early. We have prescribed 3 nausea medicines to help. Take the medicines in this order:

#1 Ondansetron (Zofran)

Zofran was created to help control nausea caused by chemo.

- You may take one 8 mg tablet every 6 hours.
- If your nausea does not ease by 30 minutes after taking Zofran, take medicine #2, prochlorperazine (Compazine).

About this Medicine

- Zofran will not make you sleepy. **Rare** side effects include headache, constipation, or diarrhea.
- Zofran is in the same family as drugs you were given by IV (*intravenously*) right before you received chemo.



Always take your medicines exactly as your doctor prescribed.

- If you received Aloxi (Palonosetron) in your IV before chemo: **Do not start to take Zofran until 24 to 36 hours after your treatment.** Aloxi is a long-lasting medicine in the same drug family. It will still be active in your system 24 to 36 hours after treatment. Ask the nurse who is giving you chemotherapy if you received Aloxi, and when you may start taking Zofran.

#2 Prochlorperazine (Compazine)

This medicine has used for many years to control nausea. It works differently in your body than Zofran. It can be very helpful for mild nausea or if you take it after you take Zofran.

- You may take one 10 mg tablet every 6 hours.
- You may alternate this medicine with Zofran so you are taking an anti-nausea medicine every 3 hours. For example:
 - 6 a.m.: Take 1 tablet of Zofran
 - 9 a.m.: Take 1 tablet of Compazine
 - 12 p.m.: Take 1 tablet of Zofran
 - 3 p.m.: Take 1 tablet of Compazine

Repeat in this order every 3 hours.

- If your nausea does not go away 30 minutes after taking Compazine, take medicine #3, lorazepam (Ativan).

About this Medicine

- Compazine may make you sleepy.
- For your safety and the safety of others, do **not** drive or use machinery after taking Compazine.

#3 Lorazepam (Ativan)

This medicine helps with nausea, anxiety, and insomnia.

- It may be taken every 8 hours.
- You can dissolve the pill under your tongue if you cannot swallow it.
- You can alternate Ativan with Zofran. But, make sure that you:
 - **Wait 8 hours** after taking Ativan to take another dose
 - **Wait 6 hours** after taking Zofran before you take another dose

For example:

- Take Ativan at 6 a.m., 2 p.m., and 10 p.m. (every 8 hours)
- Take Zofran at 8 a.m., 2 p.m., 8 p.m., and 2 a.m. (every 6 hours)

About this Medicine

- Ativan will make you very sleepy. Take it before you go to bed, if you are planning to take a nap, or do not have anything you need to do.
- We also suggest taking this medicine if you feel anxious or nauseated before receiving chemo.
- For your safety and the safety of others, do not drive or use machinery after taking Ativan.

Getting Nausea Before Chemotherapy

Some patients who have had nausea after chemo get *anticipatory nausea*. These patients have nausea before future doses of chemo, when thinking about chemo, or when going to their oncologist's office.

If you have nausea at these times, try taking Ativan. **If you are going to a treatment, make sure that someone else does the driving.**

Hydration

It is vital that you stay hydrated. Try to drink 6 to 8 glasses of water each day. If you are vomiting:

- Replace lost electrolytes with drinks such as Gatorade. If the taste is too strong or sweet, dilute it with water.
- Try eating small meals during the day. Do not get too hungry.

Other Tips

To help ease nausea, you can also:

- Avoid foods that have a strong smell. Foods that are cold or at room temperature may not smell as strong.
- Eat foods that are easy to digest. Avoid fatty, greasy, or very salty foods.
- Take your anti-nausea medicine 1 hour before meals.

What if these medicines do not work for me?

Dehydration or electrolyte imbalance can cause **serious** problems in your body. We want to manage nausea and vomiting as early as we can.

- Call the nurse at 206.598.9467 if you cannot control your nausea or vomiting. We can provide IV fluids, electrolyte replacement, and anti-nausea medicines.
- Call 206.598.9467 **right away** if you have not kept anything down for 24 hours. After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask for the Neurology Resident on call to be paged.

Please tell us if there any other ways we can help. We are here to provide you with the best possible care.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Alvord Brain Tumor Center Nurse Line at 206.598.9467.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask for the Neurology resident on call to be paged.