

Dealing with Nausea / Vomiting

"Yeah, that's when my hair was growing in..." – Leah Davis, Patient

Leah Davis is celebrating an anniversary with her sister.

"Do you remember when I was in the hospital..." – Leah Davis, Patient

It's been two years since Leah was treated for acute myeloid leukemia- a form of blood cancer. Today, she's doing great; and Leah has come away from the experience with lessons to share.

"When people hear the word cancer, they think it's a death sentence – and it's not; it's not. It's holding on; it's having hope." – Leah Davis, Patient

And "having hope" was a big part of Leah's journey – because it was not an easy one. Her treatment included multiple rounds of chemotherapy.... Along with a common side effect.

"I did have nausea, and there were a few days where I actually, that I got sick. My stomach couldn't tolerate certain things at the time." – Leah Davis, Patient

About three of every four people on chemo have nausea or vomiting. But often not to the extent you might have heard.

"There's a perception when we talk about cancer chemo that invokes somebody hunched over a toilet bowl with persistent nausea and vomiting and basically a terrible quality of life. And that's really a myth, because patients are working and living a completely normal life." – Ajai Chari, MD / Oncologist

That's because there are effective ways to help alleviate or even prevent nausea and vomiting during cancer treatment.

First: medications. Many are available that can help. Which one is best for you may depend on the cause of your nausea.

"Some nausea originates in the brain, and that can be either because there's an emotional anticipatory quality to that; and there's a particular class of drugs called benzodiazepines, which are helpful for that. And that's where somebody may just get nauseous coming to the cancer center, because they associate it with getting chemo." "There are also a lot of drugs that target the component of the brain that triggers nausea and vomiting; And then, lastly, sometimes patients are so constipated that they get nauseous because they're not

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moving their bowels – and so that obviously needs to be treated differently.” - Ajai Chari, MD / Oncologist

Keeping track of when you experience nausea or vomiting... and sharing the information with your healthcare team can help them select the most effective medication for you.

Other strategies to reduce nausea and vomiting include: Avoid foods that are greasy, fried, spicy or sweet. Eat a light and healthful snack before treatment; Wait at least an hour after treatment to eat or drink anything;

And eat foods at room temperature, or cold. When food is warm, it has more aroma, and odors can trigger nausea.

Also, drink lots of water or other clear liquids.

If you have trouble keeping down a full glass at a time, sip throughout the day.

Sports beverages and other drinks containing electrolytes can be helpful if you're vomiting, because they replace minerals and salts that are lost.

"One of the alarm symptoms for nausea and vomiting – i.e. when you should contact your healthcare provider – would be in somebody who is unable to keep down even liquids. And that can be dangerous.” - Ajai Chari, MD / Oncologist

Ongoing nausea or vomiting can lead to malnourishment, which can interfere with the effectiveness of your treatment.

That's all the more reason to communicate with your care team if you experience nausea, so they can find solutions that work for you.

"We can really get a handle on the symptoms; patients shouldn't be suffering from this.” - Ajai Chari, MD / Oncologist