

TITLE: Nausea and Vomiting

Topic: 12

Nausea and/or vomiting can be very distressing and difficult to treat due to the multiple mechanisms and potential causes.

Nausea is a very unpleasant feeling which may or may not be relieved by vomiting the gastric contents. There are many receptors and mechanisms that trigger nausea. Assessment is an essential component to ensure that the correct medication choices are made.

Causes can be multifactorial and include:

- Medication side effects; chemotherapy, opioids
- Constipation and obstruction
- Tumors in the abdomen
- Brain tumors or metastasis
- Fluid and electrolyte imbalances including dehydration
- Movement and irritation of the vestibular system
- Poor bowel motility
- Anxiety and anticipatory nausea
- Toxins from infection and/or tumors

The Pallium Palliative Pocketbook: a peer reviewed, referenced resource, 2nd Cdn ed. Ottawa: Pallium Canada; 2016.

What we can do:

- Medications as appropriate, may need a few medication options
- Frequent observation and attention to the patient/family
- Treat constipation/obstruction
- Hydrate if persistent vomiting
- Communicate well if related to complete obstruction (fecal emesis)
- Increase motility (Maxeran) unless complete bowel obstruction
- Treat metabolic imbalances, Ca⁺
- Steroids for brain tumor/obstruction

Other measures

- Quiet environment
- Avoid excessive turns and movement
- Fluids as tolerated
- Small portions of bland food
- Acupuncture