

Nausea and vomiting

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Nausea is a word for the feeling of wanting to vomit or be sick. Most people with HIV will experience nausea and vomiting at some time.

Nausea and vomiting can have many different causes, commonly stomach problems such as food poisoning and infections; pregnancy; travel sickness; or emotional problems such as anxiety. They are also common side-effects of HIV treatment and some of the other drugs that people with HIV sometimes need to take.

HIV treatment and feeling sick

Many anti-HIV drugs can make you feel sick. Most often this is a side-effect that goes away after a few days or weeks of taking a drug. You can find out more about anti-HIV drugs and their possible side-effects in our *Anti-HIV drugs* booklet, available at www.aidsmap.com/booklets.

If nausea is accompanied by other symptoms, then it's important to find out the reasons. If it is due to drug side-effects you may want to discuss with your doctor whether you can cope with the feeling of sickness or being sick, or if it you'd like to change treatment.

Some drugs can be taken with food to reduce the risk of feeling sick. It is a good idea to talk to your HIV pharmacist or doctor about this to clarify which foods can be eaten with your medication, and whether there are any foods you should avoid.

Anti-sickness medicines

Medicines are available to help reduce sickness. They are sometimes called anti-emetics. Your doctor can prescribe them if you need them. They are taken either as tablets or by injection.

Your doctor may give you anti-sickness medicines if you are starting a new medicine that has nausea and vomiting as a side-effect. These side-effects usually go away after a few weeks so you might not need to take them for very long.

Some of the anti-sickness medicines include metoclopramide, prochlorperazine, perphenazine, trifluoperazine, chlorpromazine, domperidone, granisetron, ondansetron, tropisetron and nabilone. They can have their own side-effects, such as feeling drowsy, and your doctor or pharmacist should tell you about these.

Sickness in pregnancy

Nausea and vomiting in early pregnancy is very common. It is often referred to as 'morning sickness', but can occur at any time of day.

Feeling sick and being sick most commonly affect women from around nine weeks of pregnancy until week 12 or 14. Try to get plenty of rest, as being tired can make you feel worse.

Talk to your GP or midwife if sickness is causing you problems, as they can advise on dietary changes that might help, or medication options.

Some things you can do to cope with nausea and vomiting

- Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day rather than two or three large meals.
- Don't eat liquid and solid food at the same meal. Space them at least one hour apart.
- Avoid eating greasy, fatty, fried or spicy food. Instead choose bland tasting food.
- Try dry food such as toast, crackers, cereal, and fruit and vegetables that are bland or soft.
- Salty food such as crackers, pretzels and popcorn can help reduce nausea. Carry a packet with you when you leave the house.
- Don't lie flat for at least an hour after you eat.
- Eat food cold or at room temperature – hot food can worsen nausea.

- Herbal tea (e.g. peppermint or chamomile) or root ginger can help settle upset stomachs.